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The Family and Women in the Fifteenth Century: A Case Study of the Pastons

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The abstract and thesis of Diana Thurman for the Master of Arts in History were presented May 11, 1994, and accepted by the thesis committee and the masters program.

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THESIS ABSTRACT

An abstract of the thesis of Diana Thurman for the Master of Arts in History presented May 11, 1994.

Title: The Family and Women in the Fifteenth Century: A Case Study of the Pastons

This thesis questions the prevailing historical models of the medieval family, using the Paston family as a test case. It reviews the theories of three prominent historians of the medieval family: Lawrence Stone, Ralph Houlbrooke and Joel Rosenthal. Whether the Paston family and particularly the women fit the models of families as defined by the above mentioned historians is the underlying question. If the Paston family does not fit these models, what does that tell us about the current assumptions made concerning the fifteenth century family?

The thesis illustrates that the family models of Stone do not always apply to the Pastons. Houlbrooke's and Rosenthal's ideas on family are much more reflective of the lives actually led by the Pastons. Therefore, while we can not say that the Pastons were

average, they were certainly not exceptional.

The lives of the women did not fit the models as established by Stone. Their power came from the home itself, as they managed the estates, educated their children, protected their property and looked after the future financial interests of the family. Houlbrooke allows for this form of power in his studies on women. Rosenthal tends to skirt the issues of women focusing more on the power that they received as widows not as wives. If the theories of our three historians were correct or encompassing enough they would have enfolded the Paston family. Houlbrooke's theories did this. Rosenthal's arguments did not include all aspects of the family, particularly children and education. Stone's arguments, with few exceptions, did not fit the Pastons at all.

If we allow for a diversity of family structures and a diversity of roles and relationships within that structure, then we will have a much more accurate picture of the fifteenth century family.

THE FAMILY AND WOMEN IN THE FIFTEENTH CENTURY
A CASE STUDY OF THE PASTONS

by
DIANA THURMAN

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

> It was disappointing not to have brought back in the evening some important statement, some authentic fact. Women are poorer than men because--this or that. Perhaps now it would be better to give up seeking for the truth, and receiving on one's head an avalanche of opinion hot as lava, discolored as dishwater. It would be better to draw the curtains; to shut out distractions; to light the lamp; to narrow the inquiry and to ask the historian, who records not opinions but facts, to describe under what conditions women lived, not throughout the ages, but in England, say in the time of "The Pastons". [1]

The past fifty years has seen a exploding interest in the history of the medieval family and women.[2] But how the family has

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[1] Woolf, Virginia, A Room of One's Own. (London, 1929) p. 43.

[2] The English family has been looked at through the history of law and ideas, psychohistory, economic history, sociology, anthropology and historical demography. Individual families have also been studied, such as the Verneys, Lisles, Oxindens, Blundells and Johnsons. Alan Macfarlane used the diary of Ralph Josselin to open the mental world of a seventeenth-century clergyman. Chapters on family law between the fifteenth and eighteenth centuries can be found in F.W. Maitland's work. Religious change and how it impacted the family can be found in a study of familial ideals, Centuries of Childhood, by P. Aries. These are a few distinguished scholars who have advanced the understanding of family.

changed over time and what the most important aspects of that change has given rise to controversy. The impact of economic, religious, institutional and demographic developments on the family has been difficult to determine.[3] It has also been almost impossible to determine and come to agreement on the nature of the relationships among family members. Historians continue to struggle with reconciling forceful, powerful and effective women within a society that frequently afforded men opportunities seldom extended to women and placed them in a subordinate role. This thesis will question the prevailing historical models of the medieval family, using the Paston family as a test case.[4] It will review the theories of three prominent historians of the medieval family:

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[3] Historians who have worked with family settlements include K.B. McFarlane, J.P. Cooper, M.E. Finch, Lawerence Stone and L. Bonfield.

[4] I have selected the Paston family as a case study for two reasons. First, the Pastons are the only family for whom we have three generations of letters, representing almost the entire fifteenth century. Second, these letters have only been analyzed at a very superficial level. They have been used sparingly by historians, with no work focusing on them as a case study. A complete study of the women's letters should still be done. Other letters from this period, the Stonor's , Cely's and Plumpton's are not as extensive or as personal. But their letters can be found in the following sources. Kingford, C.L. ed. The Stonor Letters and Papers, 1290-1483. (London: Camden Society Publications, Series 3.29 and 30, 1919.) Malden, H.E. ed. The Cely Papers. (London: Camden Society Publications, Series 3.1, 1900.) Stapleton, Thomas. Plumption Correspondence. London: Camden Society Publications, 1839.

Lawrence Stone, Ralph Houlbrooke and Joel Rosenthal.[5] Then it will look briefly at theories concerning the roles of medieval women. Whether this family and particularly the women in it fit the models of families as defined by the above-mentioned historians is the underlying question. If the Paston family does not fit these models, what does that tell us about the current assumptions made concerning the fifteenth century family?

Theories on the Family and Women in The Fifteenth-Century

A study of the medieval family or of any particular family in

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5 I have selected these three historians for various reasons. Stone's work represents the first attempt to write a total history of the English family. While his work has come under severe criticism it is a logical place to begin when looking at the medieval family. Stone's work has become a touchstone from which other historians begin, and while his work has been critically reviewed it will be a long time before another history of the family attempts to match his in scope and scale. Houlbrooke's work challenges the notion that the years between 1450 and 1700 saw major changes in family structure. He shows that many of the elements of what we consider the modern family has deep roots in medieval society. Houlbrooke's research is well grounded in parish records, wills, records of litigation, family settlements, deeds, leases, surrenders, and indentures of apprecnticeship. Rosenthal's work focuses almost completely on the fifteenth century. He presents a uniques argument for evaluating the family based on change within its lifespan, not evolution from one generation to another. This view is unique from from the other historians cited. Other historians whose works are also invaluable include Frances and Joseph Gies, Barbara Hanawalt, Barbara Harris, David Herlihy, Susan Stuard, and others. However, their works focus on different periods, peasants, and the continent. This thesis will focus on the English, fifteenth century gentry only, as represented by the Pastons.

the middle ages must inevitably begin with the massive work of Lawrence Stone. His main stress is on "how individuals thought, treated and used each other, and how they regarded themselves in relation to God and to various levels of social organization, from the nuclear family to the state."[6] Stone sees a shift, in the medieval family, from distance, deference and patriarchy to what he calls affective individualism. These changes, according to Stone, occurred in the mentality of the early modern period, resulting in the four key features of the modern family: intensified affective bonding of the nuclear core at the expense of neighbor and kin, a strong sense of individual autonomy and the right to personal freedom in the pursuit of happiness, a weakening of the association of sexual pleasure with sin and guilt, and a growing desire for physical privacy.[7] Stone believes these factors were well established by 1750 in the middle and upper sectors of English Society. His hypothesis argues that the change in the family is measurable and evolves over a 300 year period in relationship to changes in religion, social structure, political organization, economics and literacy.

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[6] Stone, Lawrence. The Family, Sex and Marriage in England, 1550-1800. (London: Weidenfeld & Nicholson, 1977) p. 21.

[5] Stone, 22.

Stone does point briefly to the fact that there was no one family pattern or set of familial values and admits that there were quite a few different patterns. "The result was less the supersession of one family pattern and set of familial values by another than the provision of a widening number of quite different patterns."[8] He further admits that the values of professional and gentry classes do not necessarily apply to the court aristocracy, the rural small land holder, or the landless laborer. Having identified a plurality of family styles and values, Stone proceeds to divide them into three ideal family types: the open lineage family, 1450-1630, the restricted patriarchal nuclear family, 1550-1700, and the closed domesticated nuclear family, 1640-1800.[9] He argues in his introduction that these three types of families overlapped each other by up to a century and that none of them ever fully died out. Having said this, his work leans towards an understanding of the

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[8] Stone, 21.

[9] Stone sets up his entire book , The Family, Sex & Marriage, in England, 1500-1800, based on these three familial structures.

family as evolutionary, moving from one type to the other.[10] For Stone the family is defined as kin who live together under one roof, while the household is expanded to include all members living under the same roof, but who may not be related. Stone argues that "the concept of kinship carried less and less of the baggage of ideological commitment of honor and faithfulness" to one's kin group, and that at lower levels of society friends and neighbors were probably more important.[11] Stone points to property as the only security against total destitution linking extended kin groups. Power flowed to the oldest male under the system of primogeniture. He argues that this system was held together not by affective bonds but by mutual economic interests, calling these relationships a "now

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[10] Stone relies heavily on personal documents, diaries, autobiographies, memoirs and domestic correspondence for the basis of his thesis. When using these types of sources there are some methodological problems. For the most part these sources restrict the historian to the experiences of the titled aristocracy and the propertied gentry. They also assume a certain standard of literacy among the readers and writers of these works. Historians also recognize that these sources are very individual and may be influenced as much by the writer's desires as by the realities of daily living.

[11] Stone, 29.

vanished familial world." [12]

This study will focus on Stone's interpretation of the open lineage family from 1450-1630. Within the open lineage family Stone believes that the family was open to external influences and points to the following characteristics. He argues that by the late middle ages the nuclear family of the landed elite was a loose core at the center of a dense network of lineage and kin relationships, citing the following as essential characteristics of the family during this period, 1450-1630. Within the family there was emotional distance, manipulation and deference. High mortality rates made deep relationships very imprudent. Marriages were arranged for economic and social reasons with minimal consultation of the children. Close bonding between parents and children was difficult and close affection between husband and wife was both ambiguous and rare. Faith in salvation dampened grief. Substitution of another wife or another child was easy for the medieval family.[13] The

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[12] Stone, 88.

[13] Stone suggests that substitution of children or spouses was easy in the Middle Ages because of several reasons; faith in salvation and a lack of emotional attachment to each other, particularly children. The term easy is meant to suggest that emotional bonds were weak, not that it was physically a simple matter to replace a child or spouse.

family structure was hierarchical but lacked firm boundaries and was part of a wider network of relationships.[14]

Stone argues that by the sixteenth century under pressure from the state and Protestant reform, the family shifted from an open structure to a more restricted nuclear family. This focus manifested itself in several ways. First, nurture and socialization of the infants and young children became more important than in the fifteenth century. Second, husbands and wives looked for economic, emotional and sexual, satisfaction whereas the family was previously seen primarily as an economic endeavor. Third, fathers were more concerned with the education of their children than previously.[15] Stone is very clear and adamant that these developments in the family occurred in the late sixteenth century, inferring that none of the above conditions would have been true for a family living in the fifteenth century. However, he does admit that power within an

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[14] Stone, 88.

[15] Stone, 145. Stone's theories are based as much on a lack of evidence as the evidence he actually cites. He theorizes that because there is no solid evidence to show that socialization of infants, affection, and education were important in the fifteenth century these attitudes must have developed in the sixteenth century. These assumptions are one of the reasons that Stone's work has come under criticism.

individual family could be determined by the character of the husband and wife.

Stone emphasizes that the medieval values stressed the nuclear family against the kin, maintained coolness and distance in interpersonal relations within the nuclear core, and created expectations of authority and respect by the husband and father, and of submission, obedience and deference by the wife and the children." [16] He believes that power flowed to the husband over the wife and to the father over the children. Stone does point out that women's rights and status were on the decline in the sixteenth century, inferring that in the previous centuries they may have had more freedoms and power within relationships. Recognizing that the private reality did not fully match the public rhetoric, "since they had a monopoly on certain work responsibilities, their capacity to give or withhold sexual pleasures, their control over the children, their ability to scold, all gave them useful potential levers of power within the home." [17] Stone tested his theory of female power and independence against "whether or not the crimes they committed

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[16] Stone, 146.

[17] Stone, 139.

were similar in scale and type to those of men." [18] Finding the public record of female villainy wanting he determined that women were really submissive and dependent.

The theoretical and legal documents of the time, according to Stone, insisted upon the subordination of women. He points to the lower classes as the only area where husband, wife and children came together to form one economic unit. Having said this Stone, places the development of what he calls the companionate marriage in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. He argues that it was not until the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries that a woman could marry for love and enter into a partnership with her husband. Stone's views of women in the family seem vague and often overlap, tending not to support his three primary divisions of the family.

Ralph Houlbrooke sees very little change between the fifteenth and eighteenth centuries in familial forms and functions. He argues that the nuclear family was dominant and that wider ties of kinship were relatively weak. The family's most important function according to Houlbrooke has always been the "reproduction, the upbringing and advancement of offspring, mutual protection and

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[18] Stone ,141.

material support, care in sickness and incapacity."[19] He argues that there was no decline of familial functions between the fifteenth and eighteenth centuries. [20] Houlbrooke also points to considerable differences between social groups and geographical areas, noting that families conformed to the dominant form in their own social and geographical area. He believes that these differences far outweigh any changes in the family over time.

Houlbrooke does look at the changes in the ideals of family life but believes that these changes were both complex and gradual. He cites these changes as being contributed to by, "the law, Christian doctrines, classical and humanist thought and romantic literature." [21] Houlbrooke also states that the ideal of conjugal affection, husbandly and parental authority originated long before the fifteenth century began. He does recognize that throughout the period, the scope and

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[19] Houlbrooke, Ralph A. The English Family 1450-1700. (New York: Longman, 1984) p. 253.

[20] Houlbrooke cites correspondence, biographies, diaries, wills, deeds, litigations and parish registers as his sources of information. While Stone uses similar source materials, biographies, diaries and wills. He does not use parish registers or manorial records. While some sources are similar Stone and Houlbrooke come up with very different theories and conclusions. This may be due to Houlbrooke's experience with parish records, which are not used by Stone.

[21] Houlbrooke, 253.

emphasis on affection increased and lessened. However, while the shift in affection may be significant, he does not feel that it was a fundamental one. Houlbrooke also takes into consideration that there is still much debate as to how much the ideal actually impacted the majority of people.

Economics, and institutional and social changes had the greatest impact on the family, according to Houlbrooke. He argues that these areas brought real change and benefits to the medieval families, "particularly greater freedom of choice in marriage and other avenues of advancement."[22] However, there was a flip side to the benefits. In other social groups, especially the lower classes, family life was vulnerable and precarious. Their condition did not necessarily change in this period, and Houlbrooke argues that these families greatly increased in size as a result of increased levels of poverty.[23]

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[22] Houlbrooke, 254.

[23] For additional information on the lives of the lower classes Barbara Hanawalt's work, The Ties That Bound, addresses the issues of daily life for peasant families in Medieval England. She argues that the biological needs served by the family do not change over time. That the methods fourteenth and fifteenth-century peasants used to live in their society in many ways correspond with our twentieth-century solutions.

Changes in the emotional lives of people in any period is hard to assess. Houlbrooke believes that "claims that this period saw a strengthening of attachments and a greater concentration of affection within the nuclear family are suspect except in so far as they relate to small and thoroughly studied social groups."[24] He points to the overestimation of the influence of changing ideals as a reason for some historian's conclusions concerning the emotional lives of people. Although others have tended to conclude that if they can find no evidence of feelings, they simply did not exist. Houlbrooke recognizes that the personal lives of the great majority of people will forever be hidden from the historian, and to make sweeping claims based on little evidence perhaps overstates the case. Houlbrooke argues that if the emotional lives of ordinary men and women were centered primarily on the nuclear family when there is no clear evidence to believe that the same was not "true 200 years earlier."[25]

Houlbrooke believes that marriage based on love and free consent was a long-established ideal. The official image of marriage sustained by a male-dominated society was that women were subordinate to their husbands. The Church emphasized the woman's

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[24] Houlbrooke, 254.

[25] Houlbrooke, 254.

duty to be obedient to her husband. However, it also stressed the husband's obligations of tender considerations. Contemporaries thought women were inferior in intellect and virtue. The common law vested control of matrimonial property to the husband, "though dower, and personal inheritance gave many wives in propertied classes some bargaining power or even a degree of independence."[26] Houlbrooke argues that the distribution of real power within the family was very often determined by personal character, and that actual partnerships could be much less patriarchal than the ideal models might suggest.

Often the economic interests of the family outweighed the ideal image of family as established by the Church or society. While the wife was supposed to occupy a separate but subordinate sphere in relation to family economy, this was often not the case. Houlbrooke does note that the tasks performed by men and women were often separate, but in the areas where they overlapped their co-operation was very close, especially on a farm or landed estate. He also points out that at every social level a man and wife shared much of their leisure. This does not mean every relationship went smoothly; in

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[26] Houlbrooke, 119.

fact, "for many, marriage was unhappy." [27] The heaviest weight of a bad relationship fell on the wife. "Marriage was, finally, an unequal partnership, but less unequal, and less different from marriage today, than might at first sight appear."[28]

Houlbrooke takes a somewhat different approach to the belief that parents did not care emotionally for their children in the early stages of life. He argues that the Middle Ages passed on an ideal picture of a close relationship between parents and children. "Parental love was the most deeply rooted of all human instincts, and showed itself especially in the mother's tender and loving care of the helpless baby." [29] Houlbrooke criticizes the assumption that mothers did not grieve for the early deaths of their children. He sees this so-called failure to grieve as a Christian response to the belief that grieving was futile when God had taken a child back to himself. He cites the Church's belief that if a child dies before the age of seven, the age of reason, that they died without sin and went straight to the arms of God. From this perspective, death of a young child was in a certain sense joyous. Yet the living children also inherited original

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[27] Houlbrooke, 119.

[28] Houlbrooke, 119.

[29] Houlbrooke, 155.

sin and must be shown the proper way to behave through discipline. He does recognize that not all children were wanted, that birth control and infanticide were practiced, although it is difficult to ascertain to what extent. For Houlbrooke the idea that other historians, such as Stone, would say there was no affection between parents and children, prior to the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, is to fly in the face of personal documents, diaries, and letters.

Houlbrooke also argues that education was considered essential, even though this may have been done away from the parental home. The adolescent leaving the home did not necessarily sever ties to the family or the parents. He believes that, "the bond between adolescents and their parents typically remained a strong one despite long periods of separation." [30] But the expectations placed primarily on the heir could cause tension in the relationships. Affection sometimes seemed to develop more easily between parents and younger children. However, the potential for conflicts between adolescents and their parents were many and not restricted to the oldest child, as the Paston family shows.

Unlike Stone or Houlbrooke, Joel Rosenthal argues that "the

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[30] Houlbrooke, 194.

structure and the function of family organization, as well as individual roles" in their many forms exhibit diversity and plurality.[31] Rosenthal's focus is primarily on families of privilege and property in the fifteenth century.[32] His primary sources include the letters of the Pastons, Cely's and Stonors. Rosenthal argues for a coexistence of various forms of family life. This ideal places Rosenthal's arguments in direct opposition to those that argue for a particular form or model of the family as the dominant form at any given time. Rosenthal points particularly to the work of Stone as portraying historical changes in the family as operating in a single and compelling direction, as though there were an evolutionary model to which the family must conform. In presenting the case for diversity within the family structure Rosenthal believes that individual lives operated within as well as beyond the family framework and that the family had to have had various forms and purposes. "There was diversity of form and structure, and within a single form there was further diversity, for a given individual, at

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[31] Rosenthal, Joel T. Patriarchy and Families of Privilege in Fifteenth-Century England. (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1991) p. 1.

[32] Rosenthal also uses diaries, wills, and personal documents. Unlike Stone or Houlbrooke all of his primary sources are from the fifteenth century, which is why he relies heavily on the Pastons, Stonors, and Celys.

various points along each particular life line."[33]

Rosenthal attempts to focus more on the relationships between members of the family and less on the residence of each member. He argues that "just because they lived in traditional and preindustrial society, there is little reason to believe that the men and women of the fifteenth-century England failed to enjoy the freedom to participate in diverse human relationships as well as in diverse forms of relationships." [34] Rosenthal looks to the family as the universal unit by which relationships can be studied and evaluated. He also views the family unit as the means by which the older generation could impose their dictates upon the next generation. Rosenthal looks only briefly at social control and its impact on the family, but is not as cynical as H.R. Trevor-Roper when he wrote about the Pastons.

> Why must the tomb be prefabricated, the masses prepaid? It is because, in spite of all this lip-service to the family, no one really trusted anyone else, not even his sons, once his power over them was gone. In reality the family was not cultivated as such: it was a necessary alliance from which every man hoped individually to profit.[35]

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33 Rosenthal, 1.

34 Rosenthal, 1.

35 Trevor-Roper, Hugh R. "Up and Down in the Country: The Paston Letters," Historical Essays. (New York, 1966), p.31.

Rosenthal also separates the idea of family from the household, recognizing that the boundary between the two is somewhat ambiguous. There is no doubt that in the fifteenth century there were large extended households. However, it is the relationships between the household members that tells us who was actually considered family. Rosenthal believes that the "the social (as opposed to the physical) distinction between the "nuclear family" and other forms of family organization within the place of residence (from castle to hut) is obviously of paramount importance in such studies." [36] Rosenthal separates the question of who lived with whom and the links between them from that of the larger questions concerning the various forms of family structure. For Rosenthal actual residence is of less importance then the relationships between members of the family.

Rosenthal believes that there is "little evidence in fifteenth-century works which would allow us to argue for evolution in either family structure or in the calculus of affective relationships."[37] He argues that people could and usually did live, simultaneously, within

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[36] Rosenthal, 3.

[37] Rosenthal, 4.

and through a variety of family structures or contexts. First, the patriarchal family or nuclear family, molded and cast so it could bear its heavy burden of ideology and normative behavior as well as the worldly baggage of economic and sexual convenience, child rearing, and the ties of affection. Second, the horizontal family was a sprawling flexible network of kin, with siblings spreading outward until the circles were lost on the horizon and wherein cooperation, competition, and much of the life experience often fell, in high, middling, and low society, within such a framework. The last model, widowhood, was uniquly female experience. [38] It should be noted that while Rosenthal has set up an argument for diversity within the family he still uses a similar breakdown on the family unit as Stone.

Rosenthal notes that detailed studies of individuals and of individual families often reveal that the element of competition and rivalry could be nicely contained within as well as without the family. He believes that the fifteenth-century family was a base to which an individual could go when they felt they had to, without forsaking other kinds of relationships. Rosenthal points to families as aggregations of linked individuals, yoked together by the way in which society defined and incorporated biology, that the interactions

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[38] Rosenthal, 5.

between people of the same or opposite sex were partially controlled by custom and etiquette or by mannered behavior, partially by individual preferences and personal initiatives. He likens the family to an intersection.

> As a busy highway intersection is the junction of numerous thoroughfares, each (in geometrical terms) going in its own logical but different direction, so a point of family or personal intersection can bring a fair number of individuals together for some variable period of time and some length of a common course. That they come from different directions and to some considerable extent were to have separate destinations does not negate the value of examining what happens at the intersection itself, as well as to those who pass through it. Ultimate divergence is an important factor, no doubt, but so is the fact of convergence and the measure of the common course.[39]

Having created an argument for diversity within the family Rosenthal then says, "a woman was almost always the second best, the other, in a world of men and of men's historical sources and records."[40] He allows for no diversity within the role of the female, arguing that she entered life as an inferior and there was little she could do about it regardless of social status. He may have set up this stark contradiction in theories to reinforce his argument that women

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[39] Rosenthal, 9.

[40] Rosenthal, 16.

only could achieve freedom if widowed. A widow, according to Rosenthal, could potentially or hopefully occupy a positionin relationship to property and emancipation that no male could emulate. Recognizing that not all widows were left well off, Rosenthal still believes that it "brought women into a kind of peculiar semi-autonomy with which the freer life course of the men had no exact analog."[41] For some, widowhood was a desolate spell, for others independence and for most a mix of both. He looks briefly at Chaucer's Wife of Bath as a somewhat exaggerated and romanticized view of widowhood.[42] Reality was a much more somber affair. However, if Rosenthal is going to argue for diversity of form, his argument is weakened because he failed to see its applications to women.

Having looked at three different views of the family in the fifteenth century we will now turn our attention to the assumptions

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[41] Rosenthal, 17.

[42] Rosenthal does use literature from this period to enhance his arguments. However, he recognizes that because the study concentrates on people of property and privilege it is tilted in terms of social and economic status and asks questions that radiate outwards from the centrality of property and succession, rather than from other possible focal points such as labor and labor values. His use of literature is minimal and is not the primary source of evidence for his argument.

made concerning the women in the families of this period. There is no question that medieval society was predominantly masculine, and the belief system that informed it, overwhelmingly so, but there were also the realities of everyday life. "All men had mothers; some had daughters for whom they cared; and many had wives who either shared in their work, or even took over their responsibilities when they were absent."[43] We cannot make sense of the way women may have thought about themselves and lived without understanding some of the prevailing thoughts of the day. By the fifteenth century, generally shared Christian beliefs were reflected in society's laws and patterns of behavior. Women were often perceived, particularly by the clergy, as threats to chastity. For the clergy, women fell into the convenient stereotype of Eve's responsibility for the existence of sin in the world. The church felt that this provided an adequate explanation to justify woman's inferiority. This does not mean that the impact of the church on women's lives was all bad. The church, while recognizing the authority of the male, insisted on the need for free consent by both partners to marry. Given the intellectual and legal bias towards a woman's inferiority and her husband's right to domination over her,

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[43] Labarge, Margaret Wade. A Small Sound of the Trumpet. (Boston: Beacon Press, 1986) p. xi.

naturally the achievements of the husband were considered more important then those of the wife.

Literally accepting the masculine bias of most medieval thinkers seems unfair, since their efforts often include grappling with the opposing views of Christianity on women. Some priests argued that Christ himself had preached that the souls of men and women were equal, but stressed womens inferiority. Those who lived in the fifteenth century took women's inherent inferiority for granted. "Yet wives were individually active and documentary traces of what they were doing can be found. Widows often exercised real personal power and influence as independent individuals."[44] This will be most apparent as we begin looking at the Paston women. Social rank and stage of life also played a role in determining a woman's position, freedom, and sense of her own worth.

It is true that some medieval thinkers never bothered to consider the woman's place in society, since her subjection to men was considered too natural to question. However, to say that women made only a marginal contribution to society pushes against existing evidence to the contrary. Although there were also those women

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[44] Labarge, xiii.

who did find themselves exiled to the fringes of society, this did not detract from the contributions made by others. The real problem with defining the status of women is to discover where ideals and practice part company, "while bearing in mind the stunting effect these theories of woman's innate inferiority, and often depravity, probably had on many women's development."[45] Lebarge points to the fact that treatises, sermons, and instructional materials of the fifteenth century tended to reinforce the submission of women to their husbands. Nevertheless, not all women had exclusively religious interests or fitted the submissive stereotype, certainly not the Paston women.

We have presented the theories of three prominent historians; Lawrence Stone, Ralph Houlbrooke, Joel Rosenthal, and a somewhat simplified understanding of women in the middle ages. Although not in agreement, each contributed to an understanding of the medieval family and its relationships. Stone's work is by far the most massive and yet hardly any aspect of Stone's work has escaped criticism. All three historians focus primarily on the upper class, Houlbrooke is the only one who does justice to an understanding of the lower classes. Each historian uses similar primary sources: correspondence, diaries,

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[45] Lebarge, xiii.

biographies, wills, literature, and parish registers. Houlbrooke is perhaps the most thorough in his use of these sources. Still when looking at the same class, in the same period, and using similar source materials, each of these scholars have come to different conclusions about the family and women.

In summary, Stone maintains that the nuclear family became important and relationships more intense over time, that prior to the sixteenth century the family was an extended kinship group with little or no affective bonding between its members. Within society a sense of community would outweigh individual autonomy or the right to personal freedom or happiness. Sexual pleasure and love was also scarce, if present at all in marriage relationships prior to 1550. Both Houlbrooke and Rosenthal disagree with Stone's premise. Houlbrooke sees little change between the fifteenth and eighteenth centuries in familial forms and functions, arguing that the nuclear family was always dominant and kinship groups weak.

> The impression of change over time is exaggerated by failure to pay attention to the likelihood that the character of the source material changed much more radically than the feelings and attitudes reflected in it. Much evidence of love, affection and the bitterness of loss dating from the first half of Stone's period has simply been ignored." [46]

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[46] Houlbrooke, 15.

Here Houlbrooke points out that there is evidence in the fifteenth century and before which refutes Stone's central thesis. Rosenthal also disagrees with Stone, arguing that different family organizations co-existed simultaneously in all periods.

Having come directly in conflict with Stone's central argument it is interesting that Houlbrooke and Rosenthal both use similar breakdowns of the family. All agree that family and household are not the same thing. A household could include servants living under the same roof who were not kin, whereas family members were normally all blood relations. All agree that the family can best be described by our modern understanding of the term "nuclear family". A nuclear family would include a mother, father and several children, all living under the same roof. However, they do not agree on when the nuclear family was dominant. Extended kinship groups or the open lineage family were the model, according to Stone, which dominated the fifteenth-century. He notes that at lower levels of society, friends and neighbors were probably more important. Houlbrooke completely disagrees with the idea that the kinship group was dominant, pointing to the fact that families tended to model themselves on families in their own social and geographical area. Rosenthal would argue that both family models existed next to

each other. He does not take into consideration social or geographic areas.

Stone briefly looks at the external influences on the family, while Rosenthal barely touches on them. Houlbrooke is the only one who looks seriously at changes in society through law, doctrines, classical and humanist thought and romantic literature, in relation to it's impact on the family. Houlbrooke also recognizes that it is difficult to ascertain what impact the ideal had on the majority of people. Although Stone spends very little time explaining the impact of external forces on the family, he is quick to define the character of a family living between 1450 and 1630. According to Stone, a family during this period would experience: emotional distance, high mortality rates, arranged marriages with no consultation, little or no bonding between parents and children, no affection within a marriage, limited grief, shared economic interest, and a lack of firm boundaries within the family unit. With this list of characteristics, it is difficult to know where to begin. Houlbrooke and Rosenthal would agree that a fifteenth century family shared economic interests. That one point ends the area of agreement.

Houlbrooke acknowledges that assessing emotional attachments is difficult. However, he argues that the ideal of conjugal affection, husbandly and parental authority originated long before this period.

That marriage based on love and free consent was a long established ideal. All three men agree that women were considered subordinate to their husbands and we have agreed that medieval society was predominantly masculine. However, Stone and Rosenthal focus on the subordination and do not allow for female power within the home. It is Houlbrooke who believes that women may have had power within the framework of the home and that real power could also be determined by personal characters within the family. Rosenthal allows for strong female personalities but believes that women only achieved true independence when they were widowed.

In regard to children, Stone also has a tendency to be negative, making short unsubstantiated claims. In this period deep relationships were imprudent. Mothers did not bond with their children. Grief was dampened by an understanding of salvation. Substitutions of wives and children were easy. Education was not important for children in the fifteenth century. Houlbrooke would disagree adamantly with all these points, particularly in regard to the importance of children and their relationships with their parents. Houlbrooke holds the love between mother and child up as one of the most deeply rooted emotions internal to all humans. However, given the high mortality rate it is understandable that people would look for some comfort outside the family. That parents believed their

children were in the arms of God and that they did not need to grieve does not necessarily imply a lack of caring, as Stone implies. Houlbrooke and Stone are in direct opposition in regard to education, Houlbrooke arguing that education was essential in the upbringing of children. Rosenthal does not deal with the impact of children on the family or the relationships with parents as a primary focus of his work.

This thesis will review how the Paston family fits into the models as described by Stone, Houlbrooke, and Rosenthal. We will agree with Rosenthal that the nuclear family and the open lineage family existed simultaneously. However, although there was a diversity in familial forms these forms, were impacted by social and geographical areas, as Houlbrooke suggests. We will also review the external influences on the Paston family and like Houlbrooke and Labarge, will argue that Church law, doctrine, classical and humanist thought and romantic literature may not have had as much impact as has been implied by other historians. To understand the impact of external forces one would need to do a case by case study taking into consideration location, class, and stages of life within the family unit.

The bulk of the paper will consist of reviewing the lives of the Pastons as juxtaposed against the fifteenth century family characteristics as defined by Stone, arguing that Stone's

characterization of the fifteenth century family is inaccurate and does not take into consideration evidence from this period which disagrees with his thesis, most notably the Paston Letters. Houlbrooke's and Rosenthal's work will also be used to counter Stone's theories. We will also look at the lives of the Paston women in the fifteenth century and how they compare to the theories presented by Stone, Houlbrooke and Rosenthal.

> Margaret Paston was alienated from the control of her own household, and asserted her own identity by resisting the efforts of her husband and political enemies to dispossess her. Social fears of conspiracy and individual attempts at repression combine as the domestic background to Margaret's struggle for autonomy. In her letters; as in these other works, the image of the home is perhaps the most powerful trope available to express the conflicts of a medieval woman, expressing as well the medieval vision of inner and outer experiences.[47]

Unlike Deborah Ellis, I see the home as the base of what could be considered female power. In defining the role of women we are as guilty of devaluing women's roles as those historians who came before us. While we have made great leaps in looking for women within the historical records, many historians have continued to

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[47] Ellis, Deborah Sue. The Image of the Home in Early English and Spanish Literature. (Dissertation Abstracts International 1982 Oct. v 43(4) p. 1141A.

devalue the work that women did in the home and the impact they may have had outside the home. Many women have been described as marginal. Houlbrooke is the only one of our sample historians who allows for female power within the home. In this work we will explore the possibility that the image of women and wives as portrayed by society was not necessarily the reality for all women. And that while we cannot disagree that public society was dominated by men, some private worlds were controlled and managed by women as we will see in the Paston Letters.

CHAPTER II

THE PASTON LETTERS

> The artless writers of these letters here communicate their private affairs, or related the reports of the day; they tell their tale in the plain and uncouth phrase of the time: they aim not at shining by art or eloquence, and bespeak credit by total carelessness of correction and ornament. The principal satisfaction of the reader will arise from two sources. He will hear the events of the moment from persons living at the time; and will see the manners and usages of that age, painted in the most familiar language, undisguised and unadorned...John Fenn, Preface to the first edition, Original Letters[1]

The medieval family has for many years been veiled in the darkness of the past. However, new scholarship and modern awareness brought the medieval family and women into clearer view. One means by which we are able to view the medieval family and women is through letters. The Paston Letters give us a unique opportunity to view the lives of three generations, from approximately 1420-1503. Before we can analyze the letters we must look at the letters themselves and how they have been viewed

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1 Fenn, John and Mrs. Archer-Hind, eds. The Paston Letters. (New York:Dutton, 1951), xv,xviii.

by historians. Each of the family members are represented by their own letters and those that were written to them. The letters enable us to see how the family was structured, what characteristics were present and the roles each member played. Within the letters we can see the women emerge as strong individuals, with unique and separate personalities. But it is the letters themselves which we must first evaluate.

These letters allow the modern reader a small window into the daily life of a medieval gentry family. The letters had many purposes: wooing, requesting funds, offering advice and instruction, or just passing on the news of the day. The letters also give us an opportunity to try to understand the medieval gentry woman and the skills she may have needed to run a household. Particularly in The Paston Letters we see the importance of finances and how the women were accountable for their own and their husband's money and property. We also gain some insight into the jobs these women performed, in their home and with their children. In the correspondence between husbands and wives we can glean some information concerning their relationships. Through the letters, the modern historian has an opportunity to look at how this family viewed their world and themselves. The Paston Letters are but one source, which turns these shadowy images from the past into vital

human beings, active members of their families and their community.

Public attention was first drawn to The Paston Letters in 1787, when John Fenn published two quarto volumes containing 155 letters. However, Fenn did not mention the Pastons in his original title, Original Letters, Written during the Reigns of Henry VI, Edward IV. This title was quickly dropped by the readers of the day for the shorter more popular title, The Paston Letters. The first edition sold out in a week, and a second was issued immediately with some notes and corrections. He added two more volumes, containing another 220 letters and further illustrations, in 1789. [2] Fenn continued to add volumes until his death in 1794 when he left a fifth volume almost ready for publication. All of the papers used in the publications were Fenn's own property. By his death he had edited 485 documents in all, some of which were abridged. We now know that Fenn's collection included only a part of the Paston letters and papers, and he printed from it only a selection of the earliest documents. "This was a reasonable procedure, because the letters of the fifteenth century present a fairly continuous record of the

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[2] Davis, Norman, ed. The Paston Letters and Papers. (Oxford:Clarendon Press, 1958), xxv. All facts concerning the origins and current disposition of the Paston letters are taken from the work of Norman Davis.

correspondence of three generations of the family, whereas after the beginning of the sixteenth there is a break in the series and only scattered letters survive until about a century later."[3]

In 1865 Philip Frere, found the manuscripts of the fifth volume, with other letters that Fenn had not published, in his house at Dungate, in Cambridgeshire. He sold the collection to the British Museum in 1866. This discovery set James Gairdner to work on a new edition of the letters in 1866, incorporating additional letters and papers not available to Fenn. Gairdner published three volumes from 1872 to 1875, and he finished his last edition in 1904. Gairdner always suspected that more letters existed, and asked that the Freres look through their estate in Roydon Hall. It was not until the completion of his third volume that Gairdner received word that more letters had been found. These turned out to be the original letters used by Fenn in his third and fourth volumes. These manuscripts were eventually purchased by the British Museum, bringing together three of Fenn's volumes including the new material. The manuscripts of Fenn's first two volumes reappeared in

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[3] Davis, xxvii. Davis also provides a complete break down on the ownership of the various sets of papers prior to Fenn.

1889 in the library of Colonel George Tomline, at Orwell Park. [4] Although the manuscripts were found, Gairdner did not have access to them. These manuscripts, like the others were eventually purchased by the British Museum, bringing together at last all the manuscripts used by Fenn and making them available to other historians. [5] In 1971 Norman Davis published The Paston Letters and Papers, including letters and papers not available to Fenn or Gairdner.

What has most fascinated historians and antiquarians is a surprising feature present in the letters themselves. Many of the letters bear notes, usually endorsed, in a sixteenth century hand, it is as though the letters had been cataloged by someone in the sixteenth century. However there is no evidence to show who the anonymous annotator may have been, although there is speculation that it was a member of Clement Paston's household at Oxnead. The complete history of the manuscripts, while interesting, is somewhat complicated and reaches beyond the scope of this work. It should be

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[4] Davis, xxix.

[5] Davis, xxx. Davis gives a complete breakdown of the manuscripts held by the British Museum. He does not limit this list to the letters but includes other minor groups, wills, deeds, charters and other manuscripts that could be tied to the Paston Estates.

noted that while there have been popular reprints of selections there have only been three attempts at compiling entire selections: Fenn's, Gairdner's and Davis's. Davis's work is the last of the editions, and his is the most complete and authoritative.

The letters are all written on paper, in a great variety of sizes. A full sheet measured about 17 by 11 1/2 inches, but generally much less then this was needed. When the writer was finished, the sheet was cut off where the letter ended. The writing was usually done across the shorter side; a common shape found among the letters is a rectangle with the lines running across the longer side. Since paper was scarce the letters were often begun on the leftover paper from the letter before. Most commonly letters were written continuously, with no division into paragraphs, little or no punctuation, and erratic use of capitals. When a letter was finished, it was folded to form a small packet, secured by passing stitches or narrow paper tape through it. Some were sealed with wax and the address was written on the outside. If a letter bears an address, it almost always has the remains of a seal as well, and the folds are well marked, with the parts left outside soiled by carrying and storage.

Salutations were often done by formula and addressed appropriate to different correspondents. This is less true of the

conclusions. The formulas depended ultimately on the rules set out by the professional instructors in letter-writing. Patricia Lehman has written a dissertation examining the letters for variation in text, acts of salutation between master and servant, parent and child, husband and wife, and heir and younger brother. Lehman concluded that the salutations, once the formula was identified, provided useful clues to the relationships within the fifteenth-century family.[6]

The letters were written by the persons who signed them and by clerks, who can not always be identified. Norman Davis has looked extensively at the various handwriting styles and believes "a series of letters by a single author may be written in several different hands, each having the subscribed name in the same hand as the rest of the letter, so that it does not at once appear which if any of these is the author's signature."[7] The men's letters are fairly easy to distinguish, as they often wrote in their own hand, and when they employed clerks to write for them they always signed the letters themselves. "Many of John I's letters are written partly in a neat and regular professional-looking hand, then corrected and

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[6] Lehman, Patricia Voichahoske. "Text Act and Tradition: Salutations and Status in the Paston Family 1440-1495." Dissertation Abstracts International, 1987 Apr. v47(10), p3749a.

[7] Davis, xxxvi.

completed, and usually signed also, in a coarse and ill-formed hand which is clearly his." [8] Only a few of his letters are in his own hand the entire time. The rest of the men William II, Clement, John II, John III, and Edmond all wrote in their own hand. "The crudest hand is John I's, the most accomplished, in a rather dashingly careless but fluent way, John II's. The hand best represented is that of John III."[9] Therefore, Davis has come to the conclusion that all the men "could write with differing degrees of competence and elegance."[10]

The sources of the letters attributed to women are not always as easy to identify. Agnes's letters are all in different hands. Margaret's letters, 104 in all, appear in twenty-nine hands. Margery's letters are in four hands, and Elizabeth's are in two different hands. Davis believes that the use of so many different hands indicates "that the women could not write, or wrote only with difficulty, as so called on whatever literate person happened to be most readily at hand."[11] The signatures or lack thereof indicates

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[8] Davis, xxxvi.

[9] Davis, xxxvi.

[10] Davis, xxxvi.

[11] Davis, xxxvii.

that "the women of this family whose letters survive were not, or not completely, literate."[12] Although the women may not have written their own letters there is some evidence that they could read. In one of John's letters to Margaret he makes reference to her reading, "I praye yow schew ore rede to my moodre suche thynges as ye thynke is for here to knowe."[13]

It is difficult when evaluating the letters to know if the letters that were dictated to a clerk were taken down verbatim or were more freely composed by the person actually doing the writing. In some cases several drafts of letters were made. The family would keep one draft and a final copy was sent out to friends and business associates. Letters that were sent within the family were not always done in draft some were sent out in a very untidy state. Davis provides the only complete list of principal writers of the letters.[14]

We owe the preservation of the letters chiefly to John Paston I; for during his long absences from home, in his attempts to secure his title to property, his indefatigable wife Margaret managed the estates and wrote to him reporting what she had done and asking for

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[12] Davis, xxxviii.

[13] Davis, 413.

[14] Davis, lxxv-lxxix.

advice and instructions. John I kept all of his correspondence, a habit which was continued by his widow and sons. The practice ended when John III died in 1503.

In The Pastons and Chaucer, Virginia Woolf looks at the Paston Letters in relation to understanding the family.

> Like all collections of letters, they seem to hint that we need not care overmuch for the fortunes of individuals. The family will go on, whether Sir John lives or dies. It is their method to heap up in mounds of insignificant and often dismal dust the innumerable trivialities of daily life, as it grinds itself out, year after year. And then suddenly they blaze up; the day shines out, complete, alive, before our eyes. It is early morning, and strange men have been whispering among the women as they milk. It is evening, and there in the churchyard Warne's wife bursts out against old Agnes Paston: "All the devils of Hell draw her soul to Hell."...There is the ancient day, spread out before us, hour by hour. But in all this there is no writing for writing's sake; no use of the pen to convey pleasure of amusement or any of the million shades of endearment and i intimacy which have filled so many English letters since. Only occasionally, under stress of anger for the most part, does Margaret Paston quicken into some shrewd saww or solemn curse. "Men cut large thongs here out of other men's leather....We beat the bushes and other men have the birds... haste reweth...which is to my heart a very spear." That is her eloquence and that her anguish. Her sons, it is true, bend their pens more easily to their will. They jest rather stiffly; they hint rather clumsily; they make a little scene like a rough puppetshow of the old priest's anger and give a phrase or two directly as they were spoken in person. But when Chaucer lived he must have heard this very language, matter of fact, unmetaphorical, far better fitted for narrative than for analysis, capable of religious solemnity or of broad humor, but

> very stiff material to put on the lips of men and women accosting each other face to face. In short, it is easy to see, from the Paston Letters, why Chaucer wrote not Lear or Romeo and Juliet, but the Canterbury Tales.[15]

It is to the family and the world that they lived in that we know turn our attention.

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[15] Woolf, Virginia. "The Pastons and Chaucer." The Common Reader. (1925), 36-37.

CHAPTER III

THE PASTON FAMILY

> First there was one Clement Paston dwelling in Paston, and he was a good, plain husband, and lived upon his land thathe had in Paston, and kept thereon a plough all times in the year, and sometimes in barlysell two ploughs. The said Clement yede at one plough both winter and summer, and he rode to mill on the bare horseback with his corn under him, and brought home meal again under him, and also drove his cart with divers corns to Wynterton to sell, as a good husband ought to do. Also, he had in Paston a five score or a six score acres of land at the most, and much thereof bond land to Gemyngham Hall, with a little poor water-mill running by a little river there, as it appeareth there of old time. Other livelode nor manors had he none there, nor in none other place.[1]

In the following section we will look at each of the members of the Paston family who are well represented in the letters. [2] An early history of this family is scanty and uncertain. "A Norman descent was claimed for them not only by the country historian

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[1] Gairdner, James, ed. The Paston Letters. (London: Chatto & Windus, 1904), 28.

[2] For those members which are not represented, please see Appendix A.

Blomefield but by the laborious herald, Francis Sandford...on the evidence of documents which have been since dispersed."[3] The family and their doings became best known, because of the fifteenth century letters. Their social position, in the fifteenth century, was that of lesser gentry. William was the first of the Pastons to be known as the good judge. He brought his sons up to be lawyers. It was John I who first achieved social success by attaining the dignity of knighthood. William Paston and Agnes Berry had five children: John I, Edmond I, Elizabeth, William II, and Clement II. [4] John Paston I and Margaret Mautby had seven living children: John II, John III, Edmund, Walter, William III, Margery, and Anne. [5] This section will outline the lives of the men and women most prominent in the letters, to facilitate the analysis of their roles in the family, and describe their personalities. [6]

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[3] Gairdner, 25.

[4] For information on Edmond and Clement II see Appendix A.

[5] For information on Edmund, Walter, William III and Anne see Appendix A.

[6] Davis, Norman, ed. The Paston Letters and Papers. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1958), lii. Davis provides a much more complete Biographical Summary on the men.

William Paston

William Paston, 1378 - 1444, was the son of Clement and Beatrix Paston of Norfolk. William became a lawyer. Bishop Richard Courtenay made him steward of all his courts and he was also the steward to John Mowbray, second Duke of Norfolk. He acted as counsel for the Prior of Bromholm, about 1425,[7] and for the Prior of the Cathedral Priory, Norwich,[8] in suits which led to Williams eventual excommunication. "O have nought tespassed a-geyn noon of these iij, God knowith, and yet I am foule and noysyngly vexed wyth hem to my gret unease. One of the three, the cursed bysshop, go him excommunicated."[9] He ultimately became justice of the Kings Bench in 1429, and in the same year the monastery of Bury St. Edmunds made him a brother of the Chapterhouse.[10]

William kept very busy with his properties, commissions and working for the crown. From the accounts of his deathbed it appears that William was at times indecisive, inefficient, and indifferent to

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[7] Davis, 2.

[8] Davis, 8.

[9] Davis, 7.

[10] Davis, liii.

the interests of his family. He demonstrated neither shrewdness nor insight, perspicacity nor sensitivity. The thirty documents among the Paston letters which survive from William Paston's life reveal little about him before his death. The documents do show us what a busy man he was, yet another of those capable lawyers who lived in the fifteenth-century. James Gairdner's determination of William's character is somewhat lighter.

> Of his personal character we are entitled to form a favorable estimate, not only from the honorable name conferred on him as a judge, but also from the evidences already alluded to of the general confidence felt in his integrity.[11]

Agnes Paston

Agnes (Berry) Paston, 1404? - 1479, was the daughter and heiress of Sir Edmund Berry of Orwellbury near Royston, Hertfordshire. Agnes lived sometimes at Paston, sometimes at Oxnead, often at Norwich, until at least 1469. We know where Agnes was because she would often end her letters in the following manner, "Wretyn att Norwyche on Puluer (Ash) Wednesday." [12] But before 1474 she went to live in London, with her second son William.

Agnes's relationship with the town reveals much about her life

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[11] Gairdner, 31 - 32.

[12] Davis, 31.

and character. For example, four letters are concerned with Agnes's desire to build a wall in Paston. In these letters we can see Agnes at work in her own community, trying to impose her will and desire on her neighbors. The primary source of conflict was with the vicar of the local church. Agnes wrote that the vicar, "hathe pulled uppe the doolis and seithe he wolle makyn a dyche fro the cornere of his walle ryght overe the weye to the newe diche of the grete cloose."[13] The Vicar, William Pope, did not surrender his right to this disputed land until 1447. Others also made their feelings about Agnes plain, "Warnys wyfe" for one, "wythe a londe vosse seyd, All the devyllys of hell draws here sowle to hell for the weye thaat she hat mad." [14] Warin Herman also spoke out against Agnes following a service at the Paston Church.

> On the Sonday before Sent Edmond after euyn-songe Angnes Ball com to me to my cloosett and bad me good euyn, and Clement Spycere wiyth hyr. And I acsyd hym what he wold, and he askyd me why I had stopped jn the kyngys wey; and I seyd to hym I stopped no wey butt myn owyn...And all that tyme Waryn Herman lenyd ovyr the parklos and lystynd whatt we seyd, and seyd that the chaunge was a rewly chaunge, for the towne was undo thereby and is the wersse by an c li...And prowdly goyn forthe wyth me jn the cherche, he seyd the stoppyng of the wey xulld costs me xx nobyllys, and yet it

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[13] Davis, 27.

[14] Davis, 35-36.

chuld downe ageyn.[15]

This event seemingly took place sometime in 1450. The destruction of the first wall, while blocking the road, seems also to have blocked the processional way round the church. Agnes described the incident as follows:

> On Thurisday the wall was mad yarde hey; and a good wylle before evyn it reynd so sore that they were fayne to hele (cover) the wall and leve werke, and the wate is fallyn so sore hat it standyt ondyre the wall a fote deppe to Ballys warde. And on Fryday after sakeryngon come fro cherch warde and schoffe doune all that was thereon and trad on the wall and brake sum and wente over. But I can not yet wete hoo it was.[16]

Warin Herman's antagonism concerning the wall was only part of the general opposition directed against Agnes. Agnes was also pursued by the community: she was amerced 6d in the manorial court system. Agnes did not pay the 6d and Warin Herman neither forgot nor allowed Agnes to forget. Ten years later, in 1461 Warin Herman was reminding the receiver of her refusal to pay. "Item, I have knowlech be a trew man that whan Sharpe the reseyvore was at Gemyngham last Waryn Herman was dyvers dayes wyth hym, and

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[15] Davis, 36.

[16] Davis, 34.

put hym in mynde that the mercyment for makyng of the walle chuld be askyd ageyn and be distrynyd ther-fore." [17] Others had also not forgotten as is evident in a letter that Agnes wrote to John I. "This day Bertholomew Elys of Paston come to Norwych to me and shewyt me a retail for the terme of Seynt Michel the yere of Kyng H. vj xxxix, and jn the ende of the seyd rentall, of Waryn Kynges hand, is wretyn' Agnes Paston vijd. ob. Item, the same Agnes for v acre londxxd."[18] King was also making reference to rent that was still owed by the Pastons. Colin Richmond suggests that:

> This clutch of letters from Agnes shows us much more than the Pastons struggling to rise above, so that they may look down upon, their neighbors. It is peculiarly brotherly (rather than otherly) struggle. It takes place in a small space, as a glance at the map reveals: church, hall, and diverted road north of hall and church...there is no sixteenth or seventeenth century distancing of great house from an impinging world.[19]

Agnes also had a keen ear for the sound of a quarrel, even in

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[17] Davis, 42-43.

[18] Davis, 42.

[19] Richmond, Colin. The Paston Family in the Fifteenth Century the First Phase. (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 10-11.

church--"I told hym if hys fadyr haad do as he dede, he wold a be achamyd to a seyd as he seyd."[20] This demonstrated her dealings with the villagers of Paston, the sternness, tending to arrogance, particularly concerning the wall and indentures. The desire to have her own way became tyrannous cruelty to her daughter, who would not marry as Agnes wished. Yet Agnes does seem to have softer moods, seen best in her advice to her insatiably inquisitive son: "Be my coounseyle, dyspose youre selfe as myche as ye may to have lesse to do in the worlde."[21] But at the same time she urged Clement's tutor "that if he hathe nought do well, nor wyll nought amend, pre hym that he wyll trewly belassch hym tyl he wyll amend."[22] She complained in 1465 of John I's intrusion on certain of her property rights and showed some hostility to him when she drafted her will in 1466, saying to him in these terms: "Sir and thow do not I doo, for I will not geve so mekyll to on that the remenaunt xal haue to littill to leve on at the whiche."[23]

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[20] Davis, 36.

[21] Gairdner, no. 44.

[22] Davis, 41.

[23] Davis, 44.

Agnes had married William at a very early age. When he died she would have been almost 40 with five children. John I would have been about 23 years old, but he was away in London. Agnes was a single mother, raising her younger children and training her new daughter-in-law Margaret. Richmond points out that Agnes "lived too long, so far as the family was concerned; her 100 pounds-worth of property (her inheritance, her jointure, and her dower) was not at the disposal of the head of the family, her son John I, from 1444 to 1466, or her grandson John II from 1466 to 1479, for 35 years."[24]

Children of William Paston I and Agnes

John Paston I

John I, 1421 - 1466, was educated at Cambridge, and the Inner Temple, where he later lodged.[25] By 1450 he was a commissioner of array and became legal advisor to John Fastolf. His relationship to John Fastolf would impact his family for generations. He was also one of the executors of Fastolf's will and with Thomas Howes was

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[24] Richmond, 117.

[25] Davis, 217.

charged with administering it. [26] As part of his duties John took possession of Fastolf's Norfolk and Suffolk lands, and sometimes resided at the principal manors of Caister and Hellesdon. As the head of the family his brothers and sister were in his charge as well as Agnes'.

In 1461 he came into conflict with Sir John Howard (then sheriff), and was imprisoned in the Fleet for a short time. [27] John was frequently coming into conflict with William Yelverton, another of Fastolf's executors, who contested John I's rights to Fastolf's estates. In all John I came under fire and was imprisoned three times, all relating to property disputes. His lands were seized several times by different parties, including the King in 1466.[28] John I has been described as being small-minded, hard-headed, and cold-hearted, every inch an English gentleman.[29]

John I did ignore the last wishes of his father and of Fastolf. In both cases John I was the principal beneficiary. He was directed to

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[26] Davis, 87-89. (Fastolf died in 1459)

[27] Davis, 270.

[28] Davis, xlvi.

[29] Richmond, Colin. The Paston Family in the Fifteenth Century the First Phase. (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1990).

establish a college of priests and poormen at Caister and of William Paston's chantry in Norwich Cathedral. John I executed neither of these last wishes. It makes him appear to be a man who cared little for the dead: his father or his patron. It was Agnes who tried to remedy John I's indifference to the dead. This was one of the reasons that Richmond points to John I's character as being greedy and manipulative, "and as his position became easier he showed no inclination to be just, let alone generous to his younger brothers and sister; in addition, he was uncompromisingly covetous so far as the Fastolf inheritance was concerned."[30] Richmond defines John I's character in one word: greedy.

Elizabeth Paston

Elizabeth, 1429 - 1488, was the only surviving daughter of William and Agnes. The Pastons began negotiations for her marriage with Stephen Scrope in 1449. Scrope was Fastolf's stepson and ward. It is possible that at the time he was 50 years old and had suffered a lengthy illness that left him permanently disfigured when

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[30] Richmond, 205.

negotiations began.[31] Elizabeth refused to even consider the marriage. Her family was shocked and punished her for her resistance. She was allowed no contact with anyone, not even the conversation of a servant. She was shut away and beaten severely; "onys in the weke or twyes, and som tyme twyes on o day, and hir hed broken in to or thre places,"[32] and otherwise abused over a long period of time. In about 1450 the family was considering an alliance for her with Sir William Oldhall, the alliance with Scrope apparently having been dropped. [33] Nothing came of either arrangements, and Elizabeth eventually reappeared in the letters as if nothing unusual had happened. Agnes, who had ill-treated her before, was reported in 1454 to be impatient to be "delivered of her," and articles were drawn between Agnes and William Clopton for the marriage of Elizabeth to John Clopton. [34] In July 1454 Lord Grey of Hastings offered to introduce yet another suitor, but John Paston I replied cautiously.

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[31] Bennett, H.S. The Pastons and Their England: Studies in an Age of Transition. (Cambridge: University Press, 1951), 29.

[32] Gairdner, no. 71.

[33] Davis, 31-32.

[34] Davis, 40.

> Where as it pleasyd yowre lordship to dyrecte yowr lettere to me for a maryage fore my pore suster to a jantylman of yowre knowlech of ccc marc lyflod in cas she were not maryd, wherfore I am gretely bownd to do you lordship servyse."[35]

Even with all of the negotiations and the drafts that were drawn, none of these possible suitors were accepted. From 1457-1458 Elizabeth was at board in London with Lady Pole as is evident, from an item in one of Agnes's letters making reference to "paying the Lady Pole--xxvj s. viij d. for hyr bord."[36] Elizabeth eventually did marry, evidently late in 1458 to Lord Robert Poynings. Elizabeth talks about her husband to her mother: "my maystre, my best beloved, fayle not of the c marc at the begynnyng of this terme the which ye promysed hym to his mariage, with the remanent of the money of my faders wille."[37] Even though she had married a Lord she was concerned that her husband receive what had been promised her in her father's will. Poynings was killed at the second battle of St. Albans in February 1461.[38] In 1471 Elizabeth married

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[34] Davis, 82.

[36] Davis, 41.

[37] Davis, 206.

[38] Davis, 207.

Sir George Browne of Betchworth, Surrey. While Elizabeth is only represented in a few of the letters, it is her story which is most often quoted by historians. It is the only aspect of the Pastons which Stone uses in his work.

William Paston II

William, 1436 - 1496, was educated at Cambridge and like his brother went into law. William was also one Fastolf's trustees and was often in London on John's behalf. After John's death there were conflicts concerning inheritance between William and his nephews. His relations with his first nephew John II were strained. He served on the commission of peace for Norfolk in 1465-66. 1469-70. Agnes lived with him prior to her death in 1479. Following her death he quarreled with John Paston III over inheritance of her lands. While not represented in many of the letters William is important when looking at the family as he is the brother and uncle who comes into conflict with the other members of the family after Agnes died and then again when John I died.

Margaret Paston

Margaret (Mautby) Paston, 1424? - 1484, the wife of John I was daughter and heiress of John Mautby of Mautby, Norfolk, and his

wife Margery, daughter of John Berney of Reedham. She is the single most represented woman in the letters. It was through John Berney of Reedham that Margaret was related to Sir John Fastolf. Agnes draws attention to the familial relationship in one of her letters of John I. "I suppose that Ser John Fastolf, and he were spoke to, wold be gladere to lete his kensemen han parte than straunge men."[39] Margaret's inheritance improved the family's position socially and economically. Richmond points out that "in addition to bringing them money and strategic manors, Margaret Mautby strengthened the Paston's place in Norfolk society. With this alliance they arrived, or thought they had."[40] The introduction of John I to Fastolf alone would alter the family's future considerably. But Margaret contributed far more than manors and connections. It appears that the marriage of Margaret to John I was sought after, with much haste, primarily to provide an heir. Agnes writes about their first encounter:

> Blyssyd be God, I sende yow gode tydynggys of the comyng and the brynggyn hoom of the gentylwomman that ye wetyn of fro Redham this same nyght, acordyng to poyntmen that ye made ther-for yowre-self. And as for the furste aqweyntaunce

[39] Davis, 37.

[40] Richmond, 134.

> betwhen John Paston and the syde gentilwomman, she made hym gentil chere in gyntyl wyse and seyde he was verrayly yowre son. And so I hope ther shal nede no gret trete betwyxe hym.[41]

Although both were young, John I was nineteen and Margaret was eighteen, they seemed happy. During her first pregnancy she wrote; "Jon of Dam was here, and my modyr dyskevwyrd me to hym, and he seyde be hys trouth that he was not gladder of no thyng that he harde thys towlmonyth than he was ther-of. I may no longer leve be my crafts, I am dysscevwyrd of alle men that se me."[42] Her first son was born not long after this letter, and within eighteen months she had produced a second son.

We can see some of her personality already in her early letters of 1449. Her character and personal qualities become very clear during the first of the three violent outrages that were committed against Paston property during her lifetime. For the Pastons there were four phases concerning the Gresham property: the 1448 loss, the 1449 eviction, the 1450 revival and the 1451 recovery. The manor of Gresham had been seized by Lord Molyns in 1448; after fruitless appeals to the Lord Molyns, John Paston occupied another

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[41] Davis, 26.

[42] Davis, 217.

house in the village, and Margaret took charge of the manor until she was forcibly expelled. In a famous letter to her husband she related to him the activities at the manor:

> Partryche and his felaschep arn sore aferyd that ye wold etren ayen up-on hem, and they have made grete ordynawnce wyth-jnne the hwse, as it is told me. They have made barris to barre the dorys crosse-wysse, and they han made wyketis on every quarter of the haws to schete owte atte, both wyth bowys and wyth hand gunnys; and tho holys that ben made forre hand gunnysss they ben scarse kne hey fro the plawnchere (floor), and of seche holis ben made fyve. There can non man schete owt at them wyth no hand bowys.[43]

Here we see Margaret preparing for a seige with crossbows and pole-axes, she also describes the military preparedness of the Moleyns faction, no bows for them but handguns.

It was John's petition to the parliament in 1449 which gives us the most dramatic review of the events.

> ...pans with fier and teynes brennyng here-in, long cromes to draw doun housis, ladderes, pikoys with which thei myned down the walles, and long trees with which thei broke up yates and dores and so came in-to the seid mansion, the wiff of your seid besechers at that tyme beyng ther-in, and xij persones with here, the which persones their dreve oute of the seid mansion and myned down the walle of the chambre wher-in the wiff of you sed besechere was, and bare here oute at the yates and cutte a-sondre the postes of the howses and lete

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[43] Davis, 226.

> them falle, and broke up all the chambres and coferres with-in the seid mansion, and rifelyd and in maneer of robery bare a-wey all the stuffe, aray, and mony that your seyd besechere and his servauntes had there, on-to the valew of cc li.[44]

Later Margaret lived mainly in Norwich until after Fastolf's death in 1459, when she was often at Caister or Hellesdon. Her location can be assertained in the same manner as Agnes's. Margaret like Agnes ended her letters with a description of her location and time, "Wretyn in hast at Heylysdon the Tuesday next aftyr Seynt Lwke."[45] Margaret also managed the families property while John Paston was absent. Margaret, because she was present on the manors and overseeing them, was often the one who came under real fire when her husband's enemies came to call on the Pastons. She suffered another attack in 1465, though she was not then in residence. The Duke of Suffolk sent a force of armed men against Helledon, near Norwich, one of Fastolf's manors occupied by the Pastons. This was an attempt to undermine the Paston's claims to the Fastolf Estate. The Duke of Suffolk sacked not only their house and lodge, but the village houses and even the church.

At times John reproves Margaret and her officers for slackness

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[44] Davis, 51-53.

[45] Davis, 258.

in managing his property, and he expels his eldest son from his house because he is "as a drade amonges bees."[46] Margaret did not always side with her husband in matters concerning the children. When John II displeased his father in 1463-65, she interceded in her son's favor. "Of hem was indosyd to thow and to Hastynggys and to fyve ore sexe odyre gentylemen, and a-nodyr was sent on to yowre sone and in-doside to hym-selfe alone, and asyndy wyth-inne wyth the Kynggys howyn hand."[47] But, Margaret's support was not limited to her children, in September 1465 she visited John I at the prison in London. "Plesyt yow to wett that on Fryday after myn departyng fromme yow I was at Sudbury and spake wyth the schreve."[48] We see very little of truly intimate personal details, in the letters, between Margaret and John I. However, there was once in the unpromising times during his imprisonment that John I unbends so far as to write to his wife as "myn owne dere sovereyn lady," and to end his letter with twenty lines of laboriously humorous poetry.

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[46] Davis, 47.

[45] Davis, 289.

[48] Davis, 318.

Item, I shall telle yow a tale:
Pampyng and I haue piked your male,
and taken out pesis v,
for vpon trust of Calles promise we may (sone) onthryve
And if Calle bryng vs hedir xx li.,
ye shall haue your peses ayen good and round;
or ellis if he woll not pay yow the valew of the
peses there,
to the post do nayle his ere,
or ellis do hym some other sorough,
for I woll nomore in his defaut borough;
and but if the resyvyng of my livelod be bettir plyed,
he shall Cristes curs and myn clene tryed.
And loke ye be mery and take no thought,
for this ryme is cunnyngly wrought.
My Lord Persy and all this house
recoomaund them to yow, dogge, catte and mowse,
and wysshe ye had be here stille,
for the sey ye are good gille.
Nomore to yow at this tyme.
but God hym saue that mad this ryme.[49]

Margaret as a young woman seems to have been a very attractive person filled with life and determination. She was at once ironic and tender as can be seen in one of her letters regarding early pregnancy: "I ham waxse so fetys that I may not be gyrte in no barre of no gyrdyl that I have but of on...Ye have lefte me sweche a rememrauncse that makyth meto thynke uppe on yow bothe day

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[49] Davis, 145.

and nyth wanne I wold sclepe."[50] After her husband's death in 1466 she lived in Norwich until about 1474, when she moved to her old home at Mautby.

Concern with business brought an almost unrelieved earnestness in all of her following letters. Her routine involved such activities as interviewing workers, hearing complaints, arbitrating disputes, and supervising rent collections. She was responsible for the crops and their markets. She was also responsible for supplies, including weapons for defense. But even as Margaret got older, she always seems to be vigorous and competent in her actions. However, as the years passed she, like Agnes, seems to become censorious and stern. She implacably banned from her house the daughter who insisted on marrying beneath her. She often rebuked her eldest son, and quarreled with her second. In 1469 she was incensed by her daughter Margery's attachment to the family steward Richard Calle. "My moder and I in-formyd hym that we knowd neuer onderssstond be here sayyng, be no language that euer sche had to hym, that neythere of hem were bownd to othere, but that they myth schese bothe."[51] Despite Margaret's desire that the marriage not take place,

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[50] Gairdner, no. 4.

[51] Davis, 341.

she was unable to prevent it.

Her daughter was not her only concern; her elder sons also disappointed her. She had placed her highest hopes in the younger son Walter. But they were crushed by his early death. In the same year she rebuked John II for his failure to defend Caister adequately or rescue his brother and his men there. "Thei be like to lese bothe there lyfes and the place, to the grettest rebuke to you that euer cam to any jentilman, for euery man in this country marvaylleth gretly that ye suffre them to be so longe in so gret joparte wyth-ought help or othere remedy." [52] In later years, of this same son, she often complained of his extravagence and his neglect of his father's grave. Margaret's rebukes were stern and straight forward. "I thynk we spede and fare all the wers, for it is fowle slaundere that he was so wurchepfull beried and his qwethword not parfourmed."[53] Despite the difficult moods that her sons complained of, she kept their devotion to the end. John III writes, "ther is neyther wyff nor other frend shall make me to do that that your comandment shall make me

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[52] Davis, 344.

[53] Davis, 350.

todo."[54] Yet, before her death she was on affectionate terms with them again. In 1475 she writes to John II, "ryght webelouyd son." [55] In 1477 she took an active part in forwarding John III's suit for the hand of Margery Brews.

The Children of John I and Margaret

John Paston II

John II, 1442 - 1479, was sent to court in 1461, in the hope of gaining royal favor. John II traveled with the King in that year and the next. In 1463 he left home at Caistle, without his father's leave, to join the King in the north. This began a period when John II did not get along with his father. He was banished from home in 1464-65.[56] From 1466 he was in London, seeking probate of his father's will. John II also had to deal with outstanding disputes concerning the estates of Fastolf. He was unprepared to take over the duties of the household or his father's business, following John I's death. In

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[54] Davis, 95.

[55] Davis, 371.

[56] Davis, 127-129.

1467 he took part in a tournament at Eltham.[57] In 1468 John II and his brother John III went to Bruges in the retinue of Princess Margaret, sister of Edward IV. They went to witness her marriage to Charles the Bold, Duke of Burgundy.[58]

John II also employed a scribe to prepare his 'Great Book' of chivalric treatises and other verse and prose texts. [59] Perhaps most interesting to historians is the inventory of his books which he had drawn up in 1475.[60] John II tried very hard to live a life which reflected the chivalric ideal. He never married and wrote to his brother about his relationships with women. Although we do not know who the women were, we do know that he had one illegitimate daughter which his family recognized.

John Paston III

John III, 1444 - 1504, first appears as his mother's secretary. He then served the Duke of Norfolk. In 1464 he was back at home

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[57] Davis, 396.

[58] Davis, 538.

[59] Davis Part II, 387.

[60] Davis, 516-518.

helping his mother with the management of the estates, taking her place when she went to London in September of 1465, and was put in charge of the manor of Cotton after her return. [61] He traveled with his brother to Princess Margaret's wedding. But by the middle of 1469 he was in command at Caister. John III was often critical of his brother's absence, and inaction in protecting the family properties. In 1500 he was commanded, in a letter, by the King to attend the arrival of Catherine of Aragon.[62]

It was John III who became the head of the household after his brother died. However, John III had been assisting his mother for years in the management of the estates and was in a much better position than his brother to pick-up his father's business. It was John III who finally settled the issue of the Fastolf estates. In his letters he appears to be concerned for his brother's and sister's well being, as well as his mother's. When writing to his fiancee his letters are the most romantic, and demonstrate a level of sensitivity not present in the other letters.

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[61] Davis, 318-321.

[62] Davis, Part II, 478. (Catherine's arrival was postponed)

Margery Paston

Margery Paston, ? - 1479, was the elder daughter of Margaret and John I. The first mention of her by name is by William Paston II, probably in 1458, reporting an offer of marriage. "Howard spake of a mariage betwex his sone and myn nece Margere yowre dothere."[63] John III, in 1462, makes reference to Margery in a greeting. In November 1463 marriage was again being discussed, and when Margery went to London with her mother in 1465 it was still a live question. Another offer was made a year or two later, following John I's death.

But in 1469 she shocked her mother and brothers by clandestinely binding herself to Richard Calle, their head bailiff.[64] This came as a real shock to the family, as they had been attempting to marry her off advantageously since at least 1463. Their initial reaction was to ignore the vow and to keep Margery in isolation for at least two years. Margery held her ground and the vows were recognized as valid. However, with the recognition of the vows the family ostracized her, both as a member of the family and as a

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[65] Davis, 156.

[64] Davis, 341.

member of a specific social class. Margery's real error was not selecting a husband without her parent's permission; it was his social standing that was the problem. Though Margaret forbade her daughter the house and still disapproved of her a year later, she relented at least so far as to leave a legacy to Margery's eldest son, with reversion to the two younger.[65] In this case it was the family who was forced to accept the daughter's decision to choose independently, but Margery paid a price for her decision. Margery seems to have been excised from the family as if dead.

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[65] Davis, 382.

CHAPTER IV

FAMILY STRUCTURE: THEORIES vs. THE PASTONS

> Outside his nuclear family of birth or marriage each individual is related to a much larger group of people, the kinsfolk...In writing of kinship one must distinguish first of all between the relationships of shared blood and those created by marriage. The individual shares blood with all those who have an ancestor in common with him. His affinial relationship are established both by his marriage and by the marriages of his blood relatives. In medieval ecclesiastical law, baptism and confirmation established a third sort of relationship, spiritual kinship, between the individual and the sponsors.[1]

This section will review the structure and various aspects of the medieval family as defined by Stone, Houlbrooke and Rosenthal, juxtaposed against what we know of the structure of the Paston family.

Stone believes that there was no one medieval family pattern or set of familial values. However, Stone also believes that the patterns of behavior, within a family, change over time. In our study

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[1] Houlbrooke, Ralph. A. The English Family, 1450-1700. (New York: Longman, 1984), p. 39.

of the Pastons we are most interested in Stone's interpretation of the open lineage family from 1450-1630. For Stone the family is defined as the same kin who live together under one roof, while the household is expanded to include all members living under the same roof but who may not be related. Stone argues that "the concept of kinship carried less and less of the baggage of ideological commitment of honor and faithfulness" [2] to one's kin group, and that at lower levels of society friends and neighbors were probably more important. Stone views early modern English society as being composed of a number of very distant status groups: "the court aristocracy, the county gentry, the parish gentry, the mercantile and professional elite, the small property owners in town and country, the respectable and struggling wage-earners, and the totally destitute who lived on charity and their wits."[3] Each of these groups was a self-contained cultural unit, each had their own systems for communications and set of standard behaviors.

Stone points to a fragmentation of cultural norms. "Stratified diffusion of new ideas and practices is the key to any realistic

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[2] Stone, 29.

[3] Stone, 22-23.

understanding of how family change took place." [4] This suggests that the impact of society, the church, and literature may have also had an impact on the family structure. He continues by contradicting his own models by pointing out that generalizations about the family can be dangerous and the simple models of family evolution do not always work.

Ralph Houlbrooke sees little change in familial forms and functions. He argues that the nuclear family was dominant and that wider ties of kinship were relatively weak. However, "correspondence and personal memoranda suggest that members of the propertied classes took care during this period to maintain a fairly broad knowledge of their kindred, going well beyond those with whom they were on close terms."[5] This attention to extended kin grew out of the need to know who one was related to, since the church had very strict rules on incest. "Consanguinity barred marriage between any two individuals up to the fourth degree of kinship. In order to calculate the degrees, one had to go back to the

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[4] Stone, 24.

[5] Houlbrooke, Ralph A. The English Family 1450-1700. (New York: Longman, 1984) p. 39.

common ancestor of the two."[6] It was also essential to know who the legitimate heir was to a piece of property. "In an epoch when the land law was complex and uncertain titles and ingenious claimants abounded, it made sense to know who one's ancestors and collateral kindred were." [7] Who was considered extended kin fluctuated according to Houlbrooke.

> "In medieval and early modern England, kinship recognition and the composition of the fluctuating body of the effective kin were determined, as they still are at present, by individual circumstances and preferences, not by any clear set of rules."[8] Belonging to a well-established or famous family was often a matter of pride, but the fact of family membership did not, as some romantic descriptions have suggested, bind kinsmen together in a loyalty to name and blood which transcended the interests of the individual or his nuclear family."[9]

While the ideal of extended kin was important, the immediate needs of the nuclear family came first. Male primogeniture produced a gap between siblings and a need for parents to provide or assist their younger sons in finding a place for themselves in society. "But

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[6] Houlbrooke, 39.

[7] Houlbrooke, 39.

[8] Houlbrooke, 40.

[9] Houlbrooke, 41.

such provision depended very much on individual affection and preferences, above all on the ability to accumulate resources."[10] While parents might provide education and opportunity, few were prepared to divide the family's holdings.

Houlbrooke recognizes that bonds between siblings weakened over time as they grew and married. Marriage established a new focus of loyalty, "to which attachment to the family of origin took second place." [11] Loyalty to the family remained strongest in those children that remained unmarried. It was not uncommon for childless men to leave their fortunes to their nephews. Others wanting to help a larger group left munificent benefactions. The eldest sons were aware that their younger siblings could harbor resentment, "heirs for their part often behave in a high-handed, selfish and ungrateful manner towards younger brothers." [12] Each sibling focused more attention on their own newly formed families as they developed.

Another aspect of extended family came from the mother's side, which at times could be just as important as the father's.

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[10] Houlbrooke, 41.

[11] Houlbrooke, 41.

[12] Houlbrooke, 42.

"Inheritance of the paternal surname encouraged individuals to perceive themselves as members of their father's lines, and in nearly every autobiography which includes some survey of the author's ancestry, paternal kindred occupy more space than maternal." [13] In many areas of the world this has not changed even today. But regardless of how a family line is traced back, the status and sometimes land that women brought into a family was important. A famous maternal grandfather was a source of pride. Lands that a woman brought into a marriage were often used to endow a younger son.

> But that affinial relationships made through marriage were often very close and could indeed be the most directly useful ones at certain stages of the individual's life. Men could on occasion see their fathers-in-laws as the chief means of their advancement, even as sources of assistance in their disagreements with their own blood relatives.[14]

Overall, Houlbrooke argues that there was no decline of familial functions between the fifteenth and eighteenth centuries. Houlbrooke also points to considerable differences between social groups and geographical areas, noting that families conformed to the dominant form in their own social and geographical area.

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[13] Houlbrooke, 43.

[14] Houlbrooke, 44.

Houlbrooke believes that these differences far outweigh any changes in the family over time. Houlbrooke does look at the changes in the ideals of family life, but believes that these changes were both complex and gradual.

Joel Rosenthal argues that "the structure and the function of family organization, as well as individual roles"[15] in their many forms exhibit diversity and plurality. In presenting the case for diversity within the family structure, Rosenthal believes that individual lives operated within as well as beyond the family framework and that the family had to have had various forms and purposes.

> Change over time is always very hard to identify and to describe from ground level; indeed, it is almost impossible. As we read the tale, there is little in the fifteenth-century evidence that allows us to argue for evolution in either family structure or in the calculus of affective relationships. There seem to have been neither more nor fewer categories of expression and behavior, personal and collective, in 1500 than there had been in 1400.[16]

Rosenthal attempts to focus more on the relationships between

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[15] Rosenthal, Joel T. Patriarchy and Families of Privilege in Fifteenth-Century England. (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1991) p. 1.

[16] Rosenthal, 4.

members of the family and less on the residence of each member. According to Rosenthal there seems to have been neither more nor fewer categories of expression and behavior in the 1500's than there had been in the 1400's. Rosenthal looks to the family as the universal unit by which relationships can be studied and evaluated. "Fifteenth-century families resembled nothing so much as other fifteenth-century families, and they mostly were content to place themselves within this static tableau, even if they were not above throwing an occasional elbow in an effort to jostle their way forward in the queue."[17] A major concern in a case study is the dgree to which the case represents the norm or an exception. The Pastons, while not representative of the majority, certainly represent gentry families moving up the social ladder.

Rosenthal also separates the idea of family from the household, recognizing that the boundary between the two is somewhat ambiguous. It is the relationships between the household members that tells us who was actually considered family, not who was living together. Rosenthal believes that the "the social (as opposed to the physical) distinction between the "nuclear family" and other forms of family organization within the place of residence (from castle to hut)

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[17] Rosenthal, 5.

is obviously of paramount importance in such studies." [18] Rosenthal separates the question of who lived with whom and the links between them from that of the larger questions concerning the various forms of family structure. "The interaction of the separate members of the family groups represented, in aggregate, that mixture of voluntary and involuntary association that comprises the fabric of social life and that maps both the private and the public hemisphere."[19]

Rosenthal believes that there is little evidence which would support an evolutionary theory of family structure or of affective emotions within relationships. He argues that people could live within and through a variety of family structures or contexts. The Pastons represent all of these structures at different times in the family's history. Rosenthal also looks at the varieties of family life with their many distinctions "between the late medieval and the modern world are barely visible at the level of microanalysis." [20] Ultimately Rosenthal looks at the family in the middle ages as similar to the families of today. "There is no true family or real family, no

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[18] Rosenthal, 3.

[19] Rosenthal, 11.

[20] Rosenthal, 6.

correct and permanent list of members to which we can refer in order to set the record straight. Rather in its diversity of forms and with its divers purposes the family was an ever-changing creature with many goals and purposes."[21]

Rosenthal points to the family's potential for encompassing and masking ambivalences present within a family such as the Pastons. While this may make the fifteenth-century family seem familiar, there was a vast universe of difference and changes in material culture, religious and philosophical world views, and in technology. "But on the other hand, the people of the fifteenth century coped with the daily realities of chaos and of order, and with the bitter-sweet flavors of their close interpersonal relationships. They were often driven to respond in a fashion we still find comprehensible and even moving."[22]

The Paston family, as seen in the letters, begins with William and Agnes. Then their four children marry and the focus shifts to John I and Margaret. The rest of the letters relate to their estates

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[21] Rosenthal, 18.

[22] Rosenthal, 7.

and children.[23] The letters do not mention any of the family servants by name other then Richard Calle. There are references to servants being present and doing work but they never appear as full characters. There is no indication that the entire family was ever present at home all at the same time. Between the children being sent off to school, the sons being sent to court, or the homes of mentors, there appears to have been only twelve people in residence at any given time. While the Paston family was large, they were still a family that was focused on each of its immediate members.

Within the Paston family there is not so much a variety of forms from generation to generation as a change within the family over the life time of each generation. The family structure was similar for three generations. When Agnes was widowed, she lived with her eldest son until his death. When Margaret was widowed she continued to run the estates for her children until John II's death and John III inherited. The family, following the traditions of the day, left the family estates to the eldest sons. However, the Pastons were concerned with the development of the younger children and insured that they had good educations and suitable marriage matches. The size of the family and where everyone lived is what

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[23] For information on the family members refer to Chapter IV and Appendix A.

fluctuated the most for the Pastons. The children were in and out of the family estates, but they always had a home to return to. The only exception was Margery Paston, who left the family's home after her marriage to Richard Calle and was asked never to return.

Some forces, which impacted families, were confined to specific social groups. The possession of property, a powerful force, vitally affected family structures and marriage arrangements among those classes interested in land, and the Pastons were no exception. In 1454 John I wrote a letter to Lord Grey in which he mentions discussion about his sister's marriage. "William Clopton be the grace of God, shall wedde Elizabeth, the doughter of the seid Anneys...And the seid William Clopton shall do his feffees make a lawful estate to the seid William of londes, tenementz, rentz, and seruuysez to the yerly value of xl li."[24] Here we see John I and Agnes negotiating what they think is an acceptable marriage contract for Elizabeth. The Paston estates were made by successful marriages. William's marriage to Agnes[25] , then John I's marriage to Margaret, both enhanced and increased the estates of the Pastons.

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[24] Davis, 40.

[25] Davis, 45. Agnes inherited the manors of Melyngforthe, Stonested, Horwelbury, and Oxnead.

Who would inherit the land was an essential question to the Pastons and one which caused problems between different members of the family at different times. William II fought with John I, John II and John III trying to get his mother's land, which he felt he should have inherited as the second son.

> At whiche tyme the seid John Barell confessid afore Piers Roidon, Rumbold, and William Smyth, your seruauntez, that he was prevy of myn astate of that manere in my modirs daies and that he herd my moder speke it in hir persown and that he retorned to me and at that same tyme he toke the fem of me wherupon you seid seruauntez sealid me a testimonia in the presence of youre grace.[26]

But the most important property controversy for the Pastons was inherited from a business associate of John I, Sir John Fastolf.

Sir John Fastolf was a veteran of the French wars and was building a new castle at Caister only a mile and a half from Mautby. The circumstances of John I's married life led to the introduction to Fastolf. The relationship with Fastolf had a major impact on the Paston family. By 1450 John I was acting for Fastolf in matters of business, and by 1456 he was made one of a new body of trustees to hold Fastolf's land. In 1459 Fastolf made his will, but this will was

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[26] Davis, 193.

superseded by a nuncupative will dated in November of the same year. In this second will John Paston alone was listed as the executor and the administrator of all his estates. There were eight other executors listed in the first will who were cut out by the second. John I fought the remainder of his life to uphold the second will, with no conclusions being reached in his lifetime.

> And ordeyned that the said John Paston shalle haue alle the maners, landes, and tenementes in Northfolk, Southfolk, and Norwich in which the said John Paston or any other are or were enfeffed or haue title to the vse of the said Sir John Fastolf; and at all the feffees infeffed in the said maners, londes, and tenementes shalle make and deliuer astate of the said maners, landes, and tenements to such persones, at such tymes, and in such forme as the said John Paston, his heirs, and his assignes shalle requere thaym or any of thayme."[27]

Even though Fastolf was not kin, his impact on the family is unquestionable. The ramifications of his second will would involve the Pastons in property disputes for three generations. The Paston's relationship with Fastolf is a perfect example of the roles which non-kin can play.

John I's relationship with his brother William II illustrates the

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[27] Davis, 88.

importance of the mother's property. [28] The position of being first born carried with it moral and material responsibilities to younger siblings. Agnes Paston made John I's concern for his brethren one of the conditions for the continued bestowal of her blessing on him. "And thynke veryly non other but that ze haue it, and shal haue it wyth that that I fynde zow kynde and wyllyng to the wele of zoure fadres soule and to the welfare of zoure bretheren."[29] She assured him that they would for their part work on his behalf as hard as they could. William II we know worked with John I on Fastolf's estates until Fastolf's death. These were certainly conscientious elder brothers who did their best to further the interests of younger siblings, including sisters. It is also true that there were loyal younger brothers performing useful services for their older brothers. John II and John III had a relationship like many brothers, they helped each other when they could and fought with each other when they disagreed. John II wrote to reproach his younger brother John III for failing to alert him to a possible challenge to a piece of family patronage. "I marvayle that ye sente me no worde ther-off; butt ye haue nowe wyffe and chulder, and so moche to kare fore thatt ye

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[28] See Houlbrooke's theories, pages 86 & 87.

[29] Davis, 43.

forgete me." [30] John III's new duties as husband and father restricted his contact with his brother, who was at this time still unmarried.

Property and primogeniture were not the only concerns of a family. Stone argues that literature may have also influenced a literate family.[31] Of all the Paston's John II appears to have had the most interested in literature. In 1468 he received a letter from William Ebesham concerning a book he was having written. "My most woorshupfull and moost speciall maistir, with all my seruyce moost lowly I recomaunde me vnto your gode maistirship, besechyng you moost tendirly to see me sumwhat rewardid for my labour in the grete booke which I wright vnto you seide gode maistirship..."[32] John II's library included many of the popular works of his day, The Legende off Ladyes, Bele Dame saunce Mercye, The Parlement off Byrdys, The Temple of Glasse, and several stories on Arthur and Richard the Lion. John II's life reflects the influence of the ideal of chivalry. Although his life fell short of the ideal, he attempted to live a life of the courtly knight, as defined by the literature of his day. It

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[30] Davis, 511.

[31] See Stone's theories, pages 83 & 84.

[32] Davis, 387.

was out of this desire that he had the 'Great Book' commissioned.

Stone, Houlbrooke and Rosenthal seem to agree that the family could be defined by those kin who lived together under one roof, while the household was an expanded group of unrelated members. They disagree on when each of these groups were the most important. Stone argues that the open lineage family was prevalent from 1450-1630. Houlbrooke argues that the nuclear family was dominant then, and the wider ties to kinship were relatively weak. Rosenthal's entire argument is based on a plurality of family forms. The Pastons, as a specific case, would tend to support Rosenthal's argument for a plurality of structural forms throughout the existence of a family. While the Paston family nucleus was large, they were still a family that was focused on each of its immediate members. It is clear that the Pastons were a nuclear family, supporting Houlbrooke's argument that the family came first. However, for the Pastons, friends outside the family also played important roles in the life of the family, particularly John Fastolf.

Houlbrooke recognizes that bonds between immediate family members, particularly siblings, weakened over time as they grew and married, and that loyalty to one's family of origin took second place to the development and protection of a new family. However, this argument enhances his opinion that the nuclear family takes

priority over the extended kin group. In the case of the Pastons, as each member married they left the family core and created their own. This would tend to suggest that this particular case agrees with Houlbrooke's theories. Houlbrooke also does not totally discount the importance of extended family, even on the mother's side.

Stone points to a fragmentation of cultural norms, to understand how a family changes. Neither Houlbrooke nor Rosenthal would disagree that understanding the world within which a family lived would help you understand how they changed. John II was certainly influenced by the ideal of chivalry. However, Houlbrooke would suggest that while understanding outside influences is important the family's most significant function was the reproduction, the upbringing and advancement of offspring. That the family was responsible for mutual protection, material support, care in sickness and incapacity, and these aspects of the family did not change. Rosenthal while looking at the world which surrounded the family focused on the relationships within the family, not just the world around them.

If the Pastons were a typical fifteenth century family, we would agree with Houlbrooke that there was no decline of familial functions between the fifteenth and eighteenth centuries. But perhaps Rosenthal's argument for plurality of forms best fits the

Pastons. Their individual lives operated within as well as beyond the family framework and the family had various forms and purposes, depending on the time. The Pastons were a fifteenth century nuclear family, with a flexible network of kin and friends, and most of the women were widowed at least once. All of these forms existed within one family, frequently overlapping. There appears to have been little evolution of family structure from one generation to the next, as Stone would suggest, but rather a continued support for the family core and the advancement of the family as a whole.

CHAPTER V

CHARACTERISTICS OF THE FIFTEENTH CENTURY FAMILY

> To judge fairly of those who lived long before us..we should put quite apart both the usages and the notions of our own age... and strive to adopt for the moment such as prevailed in theirs.[1]

In regards to the issue of the open lineage family, Stone, Houlbrooke and Rosenthal point to various characteristics of the fifteenth century family, but do not always agree. All believe that the family was open to some external influences, although in different ways. Each looks at specific characteristics of the family, but Stone's list is the most specifically defined. This chapter will look at each of Stone's characteristics, in sub-sections, utilizing Houlbrooke, Rosenthal and the Pastons to agree or, in most cases, disagree with his assumptions. Houlbrooke and Rosenthal will only appear in those subsections that they have dealt with directly in their own work. The Pastons will appear in every subsection, as they

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[1] Stuart, Lady Louise. Letters and Journals of Lady Mary Coke. ed. J.A. Horne. (Edingburgh, 1889) I,p. xxxv.

are the case study against which we are measuring Stone's assumptions.

Emotional distance, manipulation and deference.

"About all that can be said with confidence on the matter of emotional relations within the sixteenth-and early seventeenth-century family at all social levels is that there was a general psychological atmosphere of distance, manipulation and deference."[2] Stone focuses on values of the nuclear family, arguing that the relationships within that core remained cool and distant.

> The degree to which the kin interacted with the nuclear core depended on social rank. It was dominant among the great aristocracy, very influential among the squirarchy, and still important among the parish gentry. The reason for this is the preoccupation with the preservation, increase and transmission through inheritance and marriage of the property and status of the lineage, of the generations of ancestors stretching back in the remote past.[3]

This distance, according to Stone, created expectation of authority and respect for the head of the family.

Houlbrooke would agree that in some kin relationships there

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[2] Stone Lawrence. The Family, Sex and Marriage in England, 1500-1800. (London: Weidenfeld & Nicholson, 1977) p. 88.

[3] Stone, 69.

was distance, manipulation and deference, particularly when it came to inheritance. "A widening economic gap between branches of a family was usually accompanied by a cooling of relations between them."[4] In many cases relations between kinsfolk were soured by inheritance disputes.

Rosenthal notes that detailed studies of individuals and of individual families often reveal that the element of competition and rivalry could be nicely contained within as well as without the family. Rosenthal points to families as aggregations of linked individuals, yoked together by the society defined and incorporated biology.

> As a busy highway intersection is the junction of numerous thoroughfares, each (in geometrical terms) going in its own logical but different direction, so a point of family or personal intersection can bring a fair number of individuals together for some variable period of time and some length of a common course. That they come from different directions and to some considerable extent were to have separate destinations does not negate the value of examining what happens at the intersection itself, as well as to those who pass through it. Ultimate divergence is an important factor, no doubt, but so is the fact of convergence and the measure of the common course.[5]

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[4] Houlbrooke, Ralph A. The English Family, 1450-1700. (New York: Longman, 1984) p. 58.

[5] Rosenthal, Joel. Patriarchy and Families of Privilege in Fifteenth-Century England. (Phhiladelphis: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1991), 9-10.

The interactions between people of the same or opposite sex were partially controlled by custom and etiquette or by mannered behavior, partially by individual preferences and personal initiatives. Rosenthal likens the family to an intersection.

While there was competition between the Paston brothers, there was also respect and an interest in the others' well being. Of all the letters that the brothers wrote, it is most interesting that they wrote most to their mother and then to each other. The relationship between John II and John III, at least in the letters, appears to have been close. Their letters tell us the most of the world outside the Paston estates and show a real interest in the other's activities. In one such letter John II writes to John III:

> I command me to yow, leyng yow wete that I haue receyuyd letter in the boxe, and the byllys also off yowre receytys where-in ye refferre yow to a rekenyng whyche ye made to me last, whych I remembre nat, nere haue no byllys off it that I remembre....I praye yow euyre haue an eyghe to Caster to knowe the rewle there, and sende me worde; and whyther my wyse lorde and my lady be yit as sottyt vppon it as they were, and whether my sey lorde resortythe thyddre as offte as he dyd or nott, and off the dysposycion off the contre.[6]

The older Pastons got on well together though there were

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[6] Davis, 413-15.

occasion for argumentative interchanges.

> Item, my modere told me that she thynkyth ryght strange that she may not haue the profectys of Clyre ys place in peasabyll wyse for you. She seyt it ys her and she hath payd most therfore yet, and she sayth she wyll haue the profectys therof or ells she wyll make more folk to speke therof.[7]

For the most part they stood together as a united family, even when there was discord among relations. They looked out for each other and helped each other when it was mutually beneficial. Their home was a place to come back to, filled for the most part with pleasant memories.

While they worked together to buildup the family, the Pastons were no exception regarding inheritance disputes. John I's younger brother William spent much of his time trying to improve his inheritance. He fought with John I over his mother's will and later with John II over his brother's. John II wrote to his mother in October 1469.

> Myn oncle William scholde have comen home every daye thys vij nyght, and thys daye or to-morrow he comyth homwardys. He and I be as goode as fallyn owt, for he hathe laten me pleynly wete that he schalle have all my grauntdames lyfflod off here enherytance and of hyr joyntore also, wherin I

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[7] Davis, Norman, ed. The Paston Letters and Papers. (Oxford:Clarendon Press, 1958), 298-99.

> trust to God that he schall helpe. I woll not yit speke of it, ner I praye yow doo not.[8]

Houlbrooke and Rosenthal would agree that under certain situations there was distance, manipulation and deference within a family. However, for Stone to ascertain that these characteristics applied to all social levels and represented a general psychological atmosphere goes beyond this case study. The Pastons, at various points throughout the family's history, exhibited each of these characteristics. The relationship between William II and his brother was certainly strained in regard to his inheritance. John II and John III did fight. But none of these individuals let these disagreements sever their relationship with the family core.

That high mortality rates made deep relationships very imprudent.

"There was a less than fifty-fifty chance that the husband and wife would both remain alive more than a year or two after the departure from the home of the last child, so that friendship was hardly necessary."[9] This remoteness according to Stone also applied

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[8] Davis, 409.

[9] Stone, 81.

to children. "One reason for this was the very high infant and child mortality rates, which made it folly to invest too much emotional capital in such ephemeral beings."[10] However, "the longer a child lived, the more likely it was that an affective bond would develop between it and its parents."[11] High rates of infant and child mortality have led others to question the quality of parental love. "It has been argued that children's deaths were so common that parents could only ensure their own emotional stability by avoiding the investment of much affection in their offspring, or that the high rates themselves were in large part due to parental neglect.[12]

Yet, Houlbrooke disagrees with the assumption that because a child may die, the parent invests no emotions in it. He does recognize that "not all child deaths can be expected to have an equal impact on parents, yet much discussion of bereavement during this period is vitiated by failure to take this simple fact into account." A baby's death, although painful, is sometimes easier to come to terms with than the death of an older child. Parental love benefits from time to grow. The risk of loss diminished as the child grew. "Grief

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[10] Stone, 82.

[11] Stone, 83.

[12] Houlbrooke, 136.

tended to become more intense as the relationship between parent and child developed a new depth and fullness with the growth of the child's personality and its acquisition of particular skills."[13]

Rosenthal's study only touches on children. However, concerning death he recognizes "that it is hard to say whether children were immediately grasped to the bosom or held at some distance until their membership was validated as serious and sustained."[14] In the context of the family he sees it as being difficult to determine whether they were or were not loved just because they might die young.[15]

In the Paston letters it is not clear whether or not any of the women were ever pregnant and miscarried or lost a very young child. We do know that Margaret and John I's son Walter died as a young adult and that Margaret was very grieved by his passing. Even though Walter was not her first born, it seems that Margaret had special feelings for him, perhaps brought about by his desire to become a priest. Sometime in 1479 Margaret received a letter from

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[13] Houlbrooke, 137.

[14] Rosenthal, 13.

[15] Having made this assertion Rosenthal does not take up the issue of infant mortality in the rest of his work.

William Pickenham explaining why Walter was not quite qualified for the Priesthood.

> Oon ys for yowre son Watre ys nott tonsewryd, in modre tunge callyde Benett; a nodre cause, he ys not xxiiij yeere of aghe, wyche ys requiryd complete; the thyrd, he owte of ryzte to preyst wythin dwelmonthe after he ys parson, wyth-owte so were he hadd a dyspensacion fro Rome be owre holy fadre the Pope, wyche I ame certen can not be hadde...[16]

Regardless of the circumstances, Margaret did not base her affection for her son on when or whether he would one day die, but on the person he was and could have been.

For Stone to suggest that high mortality rates kept the people from caring for their families is not firmly grounded in evidence, as Houlbrooke argued and as is certainly undermined by the Paston's relationships with each other.

<u>Close bonding between parents and children was difficult to document.</u>

While we would agree that bonding between parents and children was difficult to document, that does not imply that it did not occur. Stone argues that "young sons, and particularly daughters,

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[16] Davis, 365.

were often unwanted and might be regarded as no more than a tiresome drain on the economic resources of the family."[17] Stone points to another reason that parents did not bond with their children. "Quite apart from the powerful disincentive to psychological involvement caused by the high infant mortality rate, most upper-class parents, and many middle- and lower-class ones, saw relatively little of their children because of the common practice of 'fostering out'." [18] In the case of boys they were often sent away to school if the family was financially in a position to send them.

Stone also asserts that relationships between siblings was strained due to the standing rule of primogeniture.

> Primogeniture inevitably created a gulf between the eldest son and heir and his younger brothers why, by accident of birth order, were destined to be thrown out into the world and would probably become downwardly mobile. [19]

Houlbrooke, on the other hand, believes that "writers on familial duties before and during this period generally regarded the tie between parents and their young children as one of the closest of

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[17] Stone, 87.

[18] Stone, 83.

[19] Stone, 87.

human bonds...and that parental love was far stronger than filial."[20] Of all the affections, maternal love was held to be naturally stronger, at least at first. For Stone to imply that a parent does not bond with a child because someone else may nurse it, care for it, or because as the child grows and is sent away to school, stretches beyond the realm of evidence. "Letters show that fathers, too, took an affectionate interest in infants."[21] As their children grew parents were intrigued by the budding development of personality and intelligence that they could see in their children.

Houlbrooke does recognize that not all children were wanted, that birth control and infanticide were practiced although it is difficult to ascertain to what extent. For Houlbrooke, that other historians such as Stone, would say that there was no affection between parents and children prior to the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, is to fly in the face of personal documents, diaries, and letters. Houlbrooke would agree that "the love of some parents for their children could coexist with widespread indifference and

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[20] Houlbrooke, 134.

[21] Houlbrooke, 135.

neglect."[22/23]

The Pastons were all good parents by the measure of their time. All children during this period lived under the discipline and obedience of their father and mother. Nowhere in the letters are the interests of the parents divided, although there are times that one parent will intercede for a child. In one of her letters Margaret intercedes for John II with his father.

> Youre sone shall com hom to moryn, as I trowe, and as he demenyth hym hyre-aftere I shall lete you haue knowlych; and i pray you thynk not in me that I wyll supporte hym ne fauour hym in no lewdnesse, for I wylnot.[24]

Even in this situation Margaret is only willing to go so far in intervening as would seem appropriate. It was the duty of the parents to care for the child. Actual feelings for the child are more difficult to document but not impossible.

While the Pastons seem to have had close relationships with

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[22] Houlbrooke, 138.

[23] Note: In those areas regarding children, education and women other than widows, Rosenthal has little to say. His focus has been on family structure and primarily the role of the patriarchy within that structure.

[24] Davis, 294.

their children the letters do not reveal any overt emotions. In the letters we see concern for their physical well-being, including shelter, clothing and health. Many of the letters make reference to the children's needs when they were away from home. Stone is correct that parents did send their children away to school and to other's homes. However, this did not mean that they were isolated from their parents or that the parents ceased to care for them as soon as they left. "The bond between adolescents and their parents typically remained a strong one despite long periods of separation."[25] When Elizabeth went to live at Lady Pole's house she wrote to her mother concerning her impending marriage.

> And in all other thynges, as to my LadyPool wyth hom I soiourned, that ye wil be my tendre and gode moder that she may be payde for all the costes doon to me before my maryage; and to Cristofre hAnson as ye wrote vnto my brother John that it shuld have ben so.

Even though Elizabeth was not living at home Agnes was in constant contact with her and also financially responsible for her upkeep.

Stone's argument that young sons were a drain on the family and a source of conflict due to primogeniture is only partially true. It seems clear that John I and Margaret never saw any of their

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[25] Houlbrooke, 194.

children as drains on their wealth. However, this does not mean that they did not have some financial considerations. Margaret rebukes John II for extravagance and debt. "I haue a letter from zowr brothere where-by I vnderstand that he cannot nere may make no purvyans fore the c mark; the wyche causythe me to be rythgh hevy, and fore othere thynggys that he wrytht to me of that he is in dawngere fore."[26] While the rest of the letter makes it clear that she is upset about how John II spends his time and money she is also concerned for his safety. Rebuking a young son for not managing his affairs does not illustrate a lack of affection but an interest in how a young son is maturing. Margaret also refuses to provide for William III. "And as for yowyr brothyr Wylliam, I wuld ye xulde purvey for hys fyndyng, for as I told yow the last tyme that ye ware at home I wuld no lenger fyndy hym at my cost and charge."[27] What is interesting is that, at this time, while Margaret was unable to pick-up William's expenses John II did support his younger brother.

The family experienced the most conflict with John I's younger brother William II. Following John I's mother's death William II put up a fight for his mother's properties. This was actually not an

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[26] Davis, 358.

[27] Davis, 380.

unusual request since William II had been taking care of his mother at the time of her death. However, John I managed to keep his mother's property in his own family. Following the death of John I William reasserted his claim to his own mother's property. "The manere to Stanstid is in the countie of Suffolk. The astate of this manere passid nat by the dede that the astate was taken by at Huntingfeld in Norffolk, for it was nat in that shire; but I clayme this manere by my modires gifft by anothire titill sufficient jnow in the lawe."[28] While William II did have a claim it never seems to have been carried to such an extreme that the family was not able to reconcile its differences.

It is difficult to document the emotional bonding between parents and children. Even the Paston letters are not clear as to the emotional ties between the parents and the children. But for Stone to assert that families perceived their children as tiresome drains, to be fostered out and not thought of again, goes against the counter example of the Pastons. Relationships between siblings were strained at times because of primogeniture, but again this did not mean that the relationships were broken. Like Houlbrooke, the Paston letters support a variety of relationships coexisting, within a

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[28] Davis, 193.

single family from generation to generation.

Marriages were arranged for economic and social reasons with minimal consultation of the children.

While families had economic and social reasons to arrange marriages, the Paston letters show a variety of paths possible. According to Stone "marriage among the property-owning classes....was a collective decision of family and kin, not an individual one."[29] It was considered the child's duty to be obedient to the request of the parents and marry according to their wishes. It was through the making of a good marriage that a daughter or son could improve their status and solidify the family's wealth.

Houlbrooke points out that while marriages were arranged for some children "younger sons were left relatively free to choose their own marriage partners, the wealthiest families best placed to dictate or at least to influence their children's matches." [30] Houlbrooke even goes so far as to suggest that "marriage based on love and agreed consent was a long-established ideal. But that the extent of this freedom depended in practice upon political, economic and social

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[29] Stone, 70.

[30] Houlbrooke, 87.

circumstances."[31] In some upper-class circles parents were able to allow their children more freedom. However, Houlbrooke cautions that overall change occurs very slowly and often unevenly.

What has been overlooked is that not all women held to the wishes of their parents. Both Elizabeth Paston and Margery Paston married against their family's wishes. We see Agnes making the arrangements for her daughter's marriage in a letter to John I.

> Soon I grete zow wel wyth Goddys blyssyn and myn; and I latte zow wette that my cosyn Clere wrytted to me that sche spake wyth Schrowpe aftyre that he had byen wyth me at Norwyche, and tolde here what chere that I hade mede hm; and he seyde to here he lyked wel by the chere that I made hym.[32]

At this point it is clear that Elizabeth has had no input into the negotiations for her marriage, while her brother is being kept informed as to how negotiations are going. Elizabeth Clere a cousin of John I writes:

> Cosyn, I lete zow wete that Scrope hath be int this cuntre to se my cosyn zoure sustyr, and he hath spoke wyth my cosyn zoure moder, and sche desyreth of hym that he schuld schewe

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[31] Houlbrooke, 88.

[32] Davis, 30.

> zow the endentures mad be-twen the knyght that hat his dowter and hym, whethir that Skrop if he were maried and fortuned to have children, if tho children schuld enheryt his lond or his dowter the wheche is maried.[33]

In this letter it is clear that the interest of the family is that Elizabeth marry to ensure the land holdings of Scrope who was the nephew of Fastolf. For John I this marriage would have possibly resolved the conflicts he would later have over the Fastolf's estates. However, neither Agnes nor John I took into consideration that Elizabeth would find the marriage unacceptable. Agnes refused her daughters wishes and began abusing her to make her bend to the family's wishes. Elisabeth Clere continues her letter to John I explaining his sister's plight and asking that he would intervene on her behalf.

> For she was neuer in so gret sorow as sche is now-a-dayes; for sche may not speke wyth no man, ho so euer come, ne not may se ne speke wyth my man ne wyth seruauntes of hir moderys but that sche bereth hire and hand otherwyse than she menyth. And sche hath son Esterne the most part be bety onys in the weke or twyes, and som tyme twyes on o day, and hir hed broken in to or thre places.[34]

It is unclear what happened, but the negotiations with Scrope

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[33] Davis II, 31-32.

[34] Davis II, 32.

were dropped. Elizabeth in refusing to marry her mother's first choice for her made a good marriage match on her own, in her own time. William Paston II acknowledges their impending wedding in a letter to Margaret. "Myn suster and myn broder recomand hem to zow bothe, and I may say to zow in counsayll sche is op-on poyn of mariage so that moder and myn broder sett frendly and stedfastely there-on, leke as I wothe well ze wolld and it lay in zow as it dothe in hem..."[35] In the same letter William II goes on to suggest a potential marriage match for Margery, the daughter of Margaret. "Howard spak of a mariage be-twix his sone and myn nece Margere zowre dothere."[36]

However, Margery Paston married for love. The law of obedience became no law at all. After attaching herself to Calle, Calle tried to win the approval for his marriage from John III who told his brother of their exchange in a letter to him in 1469.

> Ye haue herd of R.C. Labor whyche he makyth by ouyr vngracyous sustyrs assent; but wher as they wryet that they haue my good wyll ther-in, suyng your reuerence the falsly lye of it, for they neuer spake to me of that mater, nor non othyr body in ther name....I answered hym that and my fadyr, whom

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[35] Davis, 156.

[35] Davis, 157.

> God asoyle, were a-llyue and had consentyd ther-to, and my modyr and ye bothe, he shold neuer haue my good wyll for to make my sustyr to selle kandyll and mustard in Framlygham, and thus, wythe mor whyche wer to longe to wryet to you, we departyd.[37]

It is clear that the family's biggest problem with Margery attaching herself to Calle, was not that she had selected her own husband but that she had selected a man beneath her station, and worse, the family's own steward. However, regardless of class differences the question was whether or not Margery had legally bound herself to Calle. In a fairly lengthy letter to John II Margaret describes the examination by the Bishop.

> And he sayde playnly that he had be requeryd so oftyn fore to exameyn here that he mythe not, nor woold, no lengare delayyt, and schargyd me in peyn of cursyng that sche schuld not be deferred but that sche xul apere be-forn hym the nexte day.[38]

The family informed the Bishop "that we knowd neuer onderstond be here sayyng, be no language that euer sche had to hym, that neythere of hem were bownd to othere, but that they myth schese

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[37] Davis, 541.

[38] Davis, 341-342.

both."[39] However, while the family might have felt that the word and actions did not mean that they were bound together the Bishop decided that did and Margery and Calle were considered officially married.

So while marriages were arranged, they did not always come off the way the parents had arranged them, and strongminded children did have a voice in the selection of their partners. [40]

That close affection between husband and wife was both ambiguous and rare.

This assumption does not apply to the Pastons. Close affection between husband and wife was not ambiguous or rare, in the evidence from this family. John I and Margaret's marriage was arranged, but they developed strong feelings for each other. Even Stone agrees that affection could develop, seemingly contradicting his own assumption. "It is clear from correspondence and wills that in a considerable number of cases, some degree of affection, or at least a good working partnership, developed after the marriage."[41]

While changes in the emotional lives of people in any period is

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[39] Davis, 342.

[41] Stone, 82.

hard to assess, Houlbrooke believes that "claims that this period saw a strengthening of attachments and a greater concentration of affection within the nuclear family are suspect except in so far as they relate to small and thoroughly studied social groups."[42] He also argues that if the emotional lives of ordinary men and women were centered primarily on the nuclear family there is no clear evidence to believe that the same was not "true 200 years earlier."[43]

For the Pastons, affection was apparent in many of their marriages. We have already looked at the marriages of Elizabeth and Margery who married by choice and for love. One of the most moving love letters within the Paston group was written by Richard Calle to Margery during their exile from each other.

> Myn owne lady and mastres, and be-for God very trewe wyff, I wyth herte full sorowefull recomaunde me vnto you as he that can not be mery nor nought schalbe tyll it be otherwice wyth vs thenne it is yet. for thys lyff that we lede nough is nowther plesur to Godde nor to the worlde, concederyng the gret bonde of matrymonye that is made be-twix vs, and also the greete loue that hath be, and as I truste yet is, betwix vs...[44]

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[42] Houlbrooke, 254.

[43] Houlbrooke, 254.

[44] Davis, 498-500.

The letter continues, in a similar vein, for several pages. Calle writes clearly and with great emotions concerning his separation from Margery, the woman he loves.

John III and Margery Brews also married for love. Margery writes to John III in very romantic and flowery tones. "Ryght reuerent and wurschypfull and my ryght welebeloued Voluntyne, I recommande me vn-to yowe full hertely, desyring to here of yowr welefare, whech I beseche Almyghty God long for to preserve vn-to hys plesure and zowr hertys desyre." [45] Margery begins several of her letters in this manner. Others begin with such words as "Myne owyn swete hert..."[46] These opening salutations standout because they are seen in no other letters. This would tend to indicate that Magery's feelings were strong enough that she would omit a

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[45] Davis, 663.

[46] Davis, 665.

standard salutation for a much more personal one.[47]

In the above cases it is clear that there was affection between the spouses. But what of those marriages that were arranged? John I and Margaret were married very young, having met only once. However, they are a perfect example for Houlbrooke's argument that affection between husband and wife could develop over time. Nowhere in the letters between Margaret and John I do we see the kind of flowery language illustrated above, but there is a mutual admiration and respect for each other, each wishing the other well in all their endeavors. Margaret concludes one of her many letters to

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[47] Lehman, Patricia Voichahoske. "Text Act and Tradition: Salutations and Status in the Paston Family 1440-1495." Dissertation Abstracts International, 1987 Apr. v47 (10) p.3749a. Crucial to evaluating a relationship is the pattern of choices among forms that empahsize amicitate. The distribution of respectful, neutral, and affectionate forms shows significant differences among the four groups, although the degree of elaboration shows a need for ratification of the relationship due to temporary aspects of situation rather than the quality of the relationship per se. Only letters to father are frozen into invariant formulae; the others all show frequent renegotiation of relationship. Salutations from a man to his sons and to his servants were very different in quality from those to his wife. The relationship between father and heir was less close, and that between the heir and younger brothers closer than historian of the family have assumed. Also, the expected change in the relationship of mother and eldest son occurred not at his inheritance, but much later. The conclusions show salutations to provide useful clues to the state of relationships within the fifteenth-century family

John I, "The blissyd Trynyte haue yow in hys kepyng and sende yow helthe and good spede in all yowre materris. Wretyn in haste on the Fryday next before Sceynt Bernabye." [48] Although Margaret and John I spent a great deal of time apart it is clear that they missed each other when separated for long periods.

Thus the affection between spouses in the Paston family was neither ambiguous nor rare.

That grief was dampened by an overly zealous understanding and faith in salvation.

Stone views a lack of evidence that people grieved as an indicator that their grief was either non existent or suppressed. "Moreover, belief in the immortality of the soul and the prospect of salvation was a powerful factor in damping down such grief as might be aroused by the loss of a child, spouse or parent."[49]

Houlbrooke sees the fact that it does not appear that mothers grieved for the early deaths of their children as a Christian response to the belief that grieving was futile when God had taken a child back to himself. He cites the Church's belief that if a child dies

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[48] Davis, 291.

[49] Stone, 88.

before the age of seven, the age of reason, that they died without sin and went straight to the arms of God. This was not so much a means of dampening grief, but a means by which parents who had real affection for their children could reconcile their loss. The belief that their children were in a better place made their loss, if not always easier, at least endurable.[50] Certainly the church tried to teach people to accept the impermanence of the world. "Yet the church also recognised the reality of bitter grief, and Catholics could do something constructive for their dead."[51] In this case Houlbrooke is making reference to funeral monuments as a tangible means of showing ones respect for the dead.

The Pastons do not appear overly zealous in their religious habits or in their grieving.[52] However at one point Margaret does rebuke her son for not paying enough attention to his father's grave. This may not have had as much to do with grief as with showing

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[50] Rosenthal does not deal with aspect of family grief.

[51] Houlbrooke, 222.

[52] This does not mean to imply that they were not religious. However, the evidence concerning their faith lives is somewhat lacking in the letters. The letters do not contain any theological discussions or inferences to the Paston's understanding of Christianity.

respect for authority. While grief may have been dampened by faith for some individuals, this is not necessarily negative, nor a reflection of lack of affection.

Substitution of another wife or another child was easy.

According to Stone, " family relationships were characterized by interchangeability, so that substitution of another wife or another child was easy, and by conformity to external rules of conduct."[53] Houlbrooke points out that "there were very often compelling economic reasons for remarriage, since without it the continued viability of holding or workshop could be impossible to ensure."[54]

Both Elizabeth and John III remarried when their spouses died. Elizabeth married Sir George Brown. John II writes of a visit to them at Christmas. "I haue been the merier thys Crystmesse, and haue been parte ther-off wyth Syr George Browen and wyth my lady myn aunte hys wyffe." Elizabeth's marriage to Brown was also her choice and lasted for twelve years, when she was widowed again. This time she did not remarry. John III remarried after Margery's death in

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[53] Stone, 88.

[54] Houlbrooke, 222.

1495. He married Agnes Glynde, a woman who had been married twice before. We have no information as to how they met or what motivated the marriage. There are no romantic love letters to give us any knowledge of their private relationship, as there were between John III and Margery.

While two of the Pastons chose to remarry two did not. Both Agnes and Margaret chose not to remarry. For both it was not beyond the realm of possibility that they could have remarried but there is no appearance in any of the letters of suitors or a desire on the women's part to seek suitors. They may have been motivated by a concern over bringing another man or family into the familial equation. "Remarriage and the creation of 'reconstructed' families were often accompanied in the view of contemporary observers by harsh regrets and much personal resentment and friction, which were worse when children were involved."[55]

In none of these cases were the people involved simple substitutions for missing partners. The Pastons did not remarry or have additional children simply to substitute a missing spouse or child.

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[55] Houlbrooke, 222.

The family was held together by a shared economic interest.

Of all the statements made by Stone this is the one that is most accurate. The prime factor affecting all families which owned property was the principal of primogeniture. "Owing to the demographic insecurity which threatened all families, a father tried to see to it that the heir to the estate was married fairly early." [56] However, Stone believes that under such a system both the elder and the younger children suffered. "The latter normally inherited neither title nor estate, unless one of them happened to be heir to his mother's property, and they were therefore inevitably downwardly mobile, until they had made their own fortunes in some profession or occupation."[57] The impact on the oldest child Stone suggests was the reverse. "Their entrepreneurial drive was sapped by the certainty of the inheritance to come, until which time they were condemned to live a kind of shadow existence waiting for their father to die, when they would at last come into their own.[58]

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[56] Stone, 71.

[57] Stone, 71.

[58] Stone, 71.

Houlbrooke believes that:

> Parental strategies in the advancement of children and the extent of their succes were largely shaped by law and custom and by economic and demographic facts...The preservation of a patrimony to pass down the line was not in theory incompatible with fairly generous provision for non-inheriting children, whose advancement was seen as a prime responsibility of owner and heir and a charge on the estate, except in so far as they could be provided for with new acquisitions.[59]

In the case of the Paston family Houlbrooke's assessment would hold true. The economic interests of the family included the entire family.

The Paston family was certainly concerned with their economic interest. If there was one major theme which runs throughout all the letters it is the condition of the economic welfare of the family. The letters between John I and Margaret are filled with the affairs of the estates. There are some letters which are simply inventories of purchases or loses. When the estates were under siege many things were damaged. In 1465 Margaret sent John I an inventory of goods lost or stolen.

> Thys be the parcellys vnderwryten of such godys as were taken and boren a-way at Haylesdon of John Pastons, hys

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[59] Houlbrooke, 246.

> sones, and hys seruauntys by the Duk of Suffolk seruauntys and tenauntys the xiiij day of October the v yere of Kyng E. the iiij, the whych day the place of Haylesdon was broken and pullyd down. [60]

While the Pastons were concerned with their economic interests the children were given every opportunity to make their own way. They did not have to stand in the shadow of their father or his father. If the child chose to not take advantage of the benefits afforded him that was more a reflection of the childs character then the parents wishes. In the case of both John II and John III they exceeded their father in status and were both knighted.

In the sixteenth century' husbands and wives looked for economic, emotional and sexual satisfaction where as before it was primarily an economic endeavor.

Stone suggests that in the fifteenth century "sexual alternatives through casual liaisons,"[61] were a means by which a husband found a sexual outlet since, "the emotional outlet through marriage was largely non-existent for either husband or wife."[62] Stone recognizes

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[60] Davis, 325.

[61] Stone, 81.

[62] Stone, 81.

that romantic love and sexual intrigue was "certainly the subject of much poetry..." [63] However, Stone confines these emotions to a specific social group. "It was a reality which existed in one very restricted social group: the one in which it had always existed since the twelfth century, that is the households of the prince and the great nobles." [64]

Houlbrooke states that the ideal of conjugal affection, and husbandly and parental authority originated long before this period began, even prior to the fifteenth century. He does recognize that throughout the period, the scope of and emphasis on affection increased and lessened. However, while the shift may be significant, he doesn't feel that it was a fundamental one. Houlbrooke also considers that there is still much debate as to how much the ideal actually influenced the majority of people.

Rosenthal argues that the variety of sexual behavior was so great that it must have contained ample scope for a full range of emotional links, both positive and negative and not directly linked to economic interests. We have already looked at the importance of affection and love within the Paston marriages. It is impossible to

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[63] Stone, 81.

[64] Stone, 81.

measure the sexual satisfaction achieved or not achieved within each of the relationships. However, in the case of John I and Margaret whenever John I came home from school or work Margaret got pregnant. Nowhere in any of the letters is there any indication the any of the Pastons were unfaithful to their spouses. However, John II was known at court as somewhat of a lady's man and had a natural daughter by Constance Reynforth. Regardless of her birth, Margaret recognized her granddaughter. "I bewueth to Custaunce, bastard doughter of John Paston, knyght, whan she is xx yer of age x marc, and if she die bifore the seid age, than I wull that the seid x marc be disposed by myn executours."[65]

It is clear that the Pastons shaped their lives through what was possible and what was preferred, that separate temperaments and chemistries played no inconsiderable part. Their lives and passions were not solely an economic endeavor.

Fathers were more concerned with the education of their children then previously.

Stone points to the sixteenth century as a time when fathers were more concerned with the education of their children, inferring that prior to this time that education did not play as important a role

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[65] Davis, 388.

in the life of children. Stone does acknowledge that a boy or girl very often was put for training with a noble household, or a boy may be sent to Court or sent away to school, even in the fifteenth century.

However, Stone does not focus on the education that the child received but on the fact that their parents would choose to foster them out. Houlbrooke argues that education was considered essential, in the fifteenth century, even though this may have occurred away from the parental home. [66] James Gairdner would have agreed.

> From the extreme scarcity of original letters of such an early date, we are too easily led to undervalue the culture and civilization of the age. But these letters show that during the century before the Reformation the state of education was by no means so low, and its advantages by no means so exceptionally distributed, as we might otherwise imagine. For it is not merely that Judge Paston was a man of superior cultivation, and took care that his family should be endowed with all those educational advantages that he had possessed himself. This was no doubt the case. But it must be remembered that the majority of these letters were not written by members of the Paston family, but were only addressed to them; and they show the friends, neighbors, lords, commoners, and domestic servants possessed the art of writing, as well as the Pastons themselves. Not person of any rank or station in society above mere laboring men seems to have been wholly

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[66] Rosenthal does not deal specifically with education, although he does look at John I's education in the chapter dedicated to him.

illiterate. All could write letters; most persons could express themselves in writing with ease and fluency.[67]

All of Margaret Paston's children were sent, for a while, from home. For the Pastons education played an important role in the forming of the children's and the family's future. John II was sent to London where he was introduced to the life at court and spent several years with the King. John II's real interest in books was developed at court and encouraged by his family. Perhaps one of the most significant letters left by John II was an inventory of his library.

> The Inventory off Englysshe bokis off Joh..
> made the v daye off Novembre A rr E. iiij...
>
> 1. A boke had off myn ostess at the George...
> off the Dethe of Arthur begynyng at Casab...
> Warwyk, Kyng Richard Cure delyon, a croni...
> to Edwarde the iij, pric----[68]

The list continues in this manner with the items set out separately, with an arabic numeral preceding each of the first eleven. Having been at court John III aspired to an understanding of chivalry as

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[67] Gairdner, James, ed. The Paston Letters. (London, Chatto & Windus, 1904), Introduction.

[68] Davis, 516.

depicted in the literature of the day. He even commissioned his own 'Great Book' on the art of being a knight. John II received a note from William Ebesham concerning the book. "Item, for vij quairs of the grete boke wherein is conteyned the iij parte of the seide boke, I wote wele, for the remenaunt will be in fyve." [69] Henry Hallam suggests that John II's interest in literature was not unique.

> We are merely concerned with their evidence as to the state of literature. And this upon the whole is more favorable than, from the want of authorship in those reigns, we should be led to anticipate. It is plain that several members of the family, male and female, wrote not only grammatically, but with a fluency and facility, an epitolary expertness, which implies the habitual use of the pen. Their expression is much less formal and quaint than that of modern novelists, when they endeavor to feign the familiar style of ages much later than the fifteenth century. Some of them mix Latin with their English, very bad, and probably for the sake of concealment; and Ovid is once mentioned as a book to be sent from one to another. It appears highly probable that such a series of letters, with so much vivacity and pertinence, would not have been written by by any family of English gentry in the reign of Richard II, and much less before...The seed, therefore, was now rapidly germinating beneath the ground, and thus we may perceive

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[69] Davis, 387.

> that the publication of the books is not the sole test of the i intellectual advance of a people.[70]

All the Paston's male children were sent to school. John I was educated at Trinity Hall and Peterhouse, Cambridge, and the Inner Temple. John III went to Cambridge and then served under the Duke of Norfolk at Holt Castle. Edmond was also sent to Cambridge and then later indentured to the Duke of Gloucester. Walter was going to be a priest prior to his early death in 1479 and had prepared accordingly. William was sent to Eton, although he left to enter the service of the Earl of Oxford.

> The fifteenth century is the century of the Pastons, Celys, and the Stonors--to name only the three greatest known families of letter--writers of this period. Here, as perhaps nowhere else, can we see what powers of handling the language were possessed by all that variety of men and women who used the pen mainly or solely to state their own business or pleasures. Naturally no thought of publication was ever in the writer's minds--indeed they frequently exhort their correspondents to burn their letters when read--and their writings reveal the ability of many to write straightforward unaffected prose.... Letters like these are proof enough that before the end of the century a tradition of what constituted good prose had been

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[70] Hallam, Henry. Introduction to the Literature of Europe. (1837) i, 228.

created.[71]

The role of education for the Pastons was vital, it was the means by which William Paston was able to secure his status and provide the means for his children to advance themselves. His eldest son, John I, did not let him down and used his education and marriage to advance the family. John I also gave all of his children the opportunity to make a way for themselves with his help through education and placement with suitable mentors.

In direct opposition to Stone's assumption, the father's involvement in education was important for the Pastons from the beginning of the fifteenth century.

As we have seen, the Pastons did not fit all of Stone's characteristics of the fifteenth century family. This is not to say that they were unique, but that Stone's characteristics are not valid for all cases. From the letters' evidence, the Pastons did not show emotional distance or deference to their family and friends. They did use their family and friends to enhance the status of the family. For the most part they stood together as a united family, even when there was discord among various relations. The high mortality rates of the time

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[71] Bennett, H.S. Chaucer and the Fifteenth Century. (Oxford: University Press, 1947), Introduction.

did not make deep relationships imprudent for the Pastons. The Pastons had affection for all of their children, while overt emotions were kept to a minimum in the letters. It is clear in the letters that the relationships between parents and children were strong, as were the bonds between husband and wife. While marriages were arranged for economic and social reasons with minimal consultation of the children, this was not true in all cases, Elizabeth, Margery and John III were examples of children who all married for love. While close bonding between parents and children is difficult to document that does not mean that it did not exist. The idea that close affection between husband and wife was both ambiguous and rare is not reflected in the case of the Pastons. Three of the children married for love, and the relationship between John I and Margaret was certainly one which grew into a deep affection and respect for each other. None of the Pastons were overly zealous in their faith. Therefore grief in death was not dampened by faith in salvation. Nor was the substitution of another wife or child simply one of filling in a vacancy. Elizabeth and John III both married twice and each had married for love the first time. Of all the statements made by Stone the one that holds true for the Pastons is that the family was held together by a shared economic interest. One cannot read the letters without understanding the importance of money and property to the

Pastons, it consumes much of their energy and time.

In relationship to Stone's broader generalizations, the idea that nurture and socialization of the infant and young children occurred in the sixteenth century implies that it was not present in the fifteenth century. In the case of the Pastons this was most certainly not true. Other than the importance of the marriages made, the other important factor in the advancement of this family was the development of the children through education. While nurturing may have occurred to enhance the status of the family, it did occur. Houlbrooke and Rosenthal, when their work applies, disagree with Stone on almost every single point. More importantly the Paston letters do not support Stone's arguments.

CHAPTER VI

THE ROLES OF THE WOMEN

> Medieval English society urged its secular women to marry and multiply. Though a limited number of alternatives seem to have been possible in the lower classes, life for women of the gentry was synonymous with marriage. Girlhood was merely a prelude to matrimony, and the adult years were spent as wife or widow. Some women adjusted to as many husbands as were necessary to fill out their life spans, one marriage following another within weeks of the death of a spouse. And just as the status of life was predetermined, so was its condition: the single most important requirement for the conduct of a medieval woman of any social stratum was subordination.[1]

This chapter will review the theories of Stone, Houlbrooke and Rosenthal concerning women and then compare their theories to the lives of the Paston women. This chapter will also endeavor to evaluate what type of *power* the Paston women may have had, or if their lives can be defined as having *power* in any sense.

Stone believes that *power* flowed to the husband over the wife

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[1] Haskell, Ann S. "The Paston Women on marriage in Fifteenth-Century England." Viator. 4 (1973): 459.

and to the father over the children. He does point out that women's rights and status were on the decline in the sixteenth century, inferring that in the previous centuries they may have had more freedoms and power within relationships. "In some ways the status of wives, as well as their legal rights, seems to have been on the decline in the sixteenth century, despite the genealogical accident by which so many women became queens at that period."[2] The ideal woman of the period was to be "weak, submissive, charitable, virtuous and modest."[3] Her function, according to Stone, was housekeeping, and the breeding and rearing of the children. Her behavior was to be silent in church and in the home and submissive to men.

What Stone is asserting is that the theoretical and legal doctrines of the time were insistent on the subordination of women to men, particularly to their husbands. To what degree women had *power* within their own circles is the question most difficult to answer. Stone tests his theory of female *power* and independence against "whether or not the crimes they committed were similar in

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[2] Stone, Lawrence. The Family Sex and Marriage in England, 1500-1800. (London: Weidenfeld & Nicholson, 1977), 137.

[3] Stone, 138.

scale and type to those of men." [4] Finding the public record of female villainy somewhat wanting Stone determined that women were really submissive and dependent.

The theoretical and legal documents of the time were insistent upon the subordination of women. Therefore, Stone places the development of what he calls the companionate marriage in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. He argues that it wasn't until the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries that a woman could marry for love and enter into a partnership with her husband. However, he does not maintain that subordination simply disappeared in this period. He notes that love, affection and friendship had taken last place to the economic interests of the family prior to this period. Even though "the economic contribution of the wife to the family budget did not necessarily give her higher status and greater *power*."[5]

Houlbrooke believes that marriage based on love and free consent was a long established ideal. The official image of marriage as sustained by a male-dominated society was that women were subordinate to their husbands. The Church emphasized the woman's

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[4] Stone ,141.

[5] Stone, 140.

duty to be obedient to her husband. "The partnership of husband and wife had a number of purposes. Christian teaching gave prominence to three of these: the procreation of children, the regulation of sexual activity, and mutual comfort and support."[6] Men were to honor their wives as weaker vessels and as heirs of grace together. "He was to praise her virtues and indulge her small vanities. A wife without faults was not to be expected, and to bear with them was part of necessary husbandly discretion."[7] It was thought that women were inferior in intellect and virtue.

> Men were stronger and wiser than women. The male was active and formative, the female material and passive. Less fully developed than man, woman was rendered by her predominantly cool and moist humors softer and weaker in body, less able to control her emotions, and therefore naturally unfitted either for heavy work or for public life."[8]

The common law, at this time, vested control of matrimonial property to the husband. Women enjoyed little or no security against their husband's wasteful dissipation of their goods, "though dower, and personal inheritance gave many wives in propertied

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[6] Houlbrooke, Ralph A. The English Family, 1450-1700. (New York: Longman, 1984), 96.

[7] Houlbrooke, 98.

[8] Houlbrooke, 97.

classes some bargaining *power* or even a degree of independence."[9] For husbands could not legally alienate any land in which his wife had an interest by virtue of dower or jointure. Some men even provided their wives with a separate income by means of specific marriage settlements. Houlbrooke argues that the distribution of real *power* within the family was often determined by personal character, and that actual partnerships could be much less patriarchal than the ideal models might suggest.

Often the economic interests of the family outweighed the ideal image of family as established by the Church or society. While the wife was supposed to occupy a separate but subordinate sphere in relation to family economy this was often not the case. "The husband enjoyed a superior position as head of the household, and the main responsibility for dealings outside it rested on him. Yet the wife had her own domain, which embraced the kitchen, the garden, the care of small children and the cure of minor ailments."[10] Houlbrooke also points out that at every social level a man and wife shared much of their leisure and that the husband was expected to be the dominant partner in the religious life of the household.

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[9] Houlbrooke, 119.

[10] Houlbrooke, 106.

Rosenthal argues that "a woman was almost always the second best, the other, in a world of men and of men's historical sources and records. She entered life as an inferior, regardless of her social status, and there was little she could do to alter, let alone reverse, this depressed condition." [11] Rosenthal allows for no diversity within the role of the female. "In the course of her life, if she stayed in the secular world, she was apt to marry and to bear children. Beyond this, in time, she had a better than even chance of becoming a widow."[12]

A widow, according to Rosenthal, could potentially or hopefully occupy a position regarding property and emancipation that no male could emulate. "Widowhood could be an abject fall, or it could be the vestibule leading her forward to a life of unprecedented freedom, influence, and financial independence."[13] Recognizing that not all widows were left well off Rosenthal still believes that it "brought women into a kind of peculiar semi-autonomy with which the freer

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[11] Rosenthal, Joel T. Patriarchy and Families of Privilege in Fifteenth-Century England. (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1991), 16.

[12] Rosenthal, 16.

[13] Rosenthal, 17.

life course of the men had no exact analog."[14] For some widowhood was a desolate spell, for others independence, for most a mix of both. However, Rosenthal then contradicts himself by saying that, "its potential for freedom and even power has been exaggerated and romanticized."[15]

There is no question that medieval society was predominantly masculine, and the belief system that informed it, overwhelmingly so. Thus medieval society displayed a constant, if subordinate, role for women. By the fifteenth century generally shared Christian beliefs were reflected in societies laws and patterns of behavior. Women fell back into the convenient stereotype of Eve's responsibility for the existence of sin in the world, the church felt that this provided an adequate explanation to justify woman's inferiority. Given this constant intellectual and legal bias towards a woman's inferiority and her husband's right to domination over her it is natural that the achievements of the husband were considered more important then those of the wife. "Yet wives were individually active and documentary traces of what they were doing can be found. Widows often exercised real personal *power* and influence as

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[14] Rosenthal, 17.

[15] Rosenthal, 17.

independent individuals."[16] Social rank and stage of life also played a role in determining a woman's position, freedom, and sense of her own worth. Therefore when looking at women we must consider their place in society and the stages of their lives.

The women of the Paston family in character and ability stand equal with the men. Agnes and Margaret dominate the letters. Each, after the death of her husband, managed the household and the family affairs in Norfolk. Agnes would have been almost 40 when William died, leaving her with four children to raise. Margaret, who was fortythree when John died, raised eight children, encouraging their education and arranging their marriages. When her eldest son came of age he was considered the head of the family, but Margaret continued to manage the estates. While Margaret did not interfere in her grown son's lives, she did state her opinion on how they should run their lives. Her unmarried daughters received a somewhat different treatment than her sons. Her words were often short and strong with an occasional emphasis through isolation and beating.

In assessing the jobs these women did, we must not overlook their environment, both physical and social. The family's lands were isolated, some were close to the sea, and at various times there was

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[16] Labarge, xiii.

chaos resulting from political unrest and plague. They would have had to cope with their tenant's fears and the family's safety against murderers, pirates, armed sieges, rape and in the Pastons case at least one kidnapping attempt against Margaret. The gentry households were often moved from one manor to the next, trying to avoid trouble and the plague. There were also ideal concepts of women prevalent in medieval society. "A list might include such divers views as the practical didacticism of the Knight of La Tour Landry, the subjective religious visions of Margery Kempe and Julian of Norwich...to the nostalgic yearning of Sir Thomas Malory." [17] Yet the Paston women stand in contrast to the popular notions of medieval women. Agnes and Margaret can be seen as practical individuals with real economic and social *power.*

There is some evidence of literary influence. The Pastons were all avid readers, and "the booklist of their library confirms their acquaintance with literary aristocratic society, via romances and courtesy books."[18] A description of the court of Charles the Bold, at his marriage to the Princess Margaret of England appears in the

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[17] Haskell, Ann S. "The Paston Women on Marriage in Fifteenth Century England." Viator. 4 (1973), 459. Malory was a contemporary of Margaret Paston.

[18] Haskell, 461.

letters of John III. Both John II and John III attended this wedding.

> And the same Sonday my lord the Bastard took vpon hym to answere xxiiij knytys and gentylmen wyth-in viij dayis at jostys and pese; and whe that they wer answeryd they xxiij and hym-selue schold torney wyth othyr....And asfor the Dwkys coor, as of lordys ladys, and gentylwomen, knytys, sqwyirs, and gentyllmen, I herdneuer of non lyek to it saue Kyng Artourys cort.[19]

In this letter we get a glimpse at court but also of a language a lifestyle that stands in stark contrast to the life that Margaret was leading at the time when John III wrote to her.

The church also played a role in creating an ideal concept of medieval women based on an understanding of Mary and Eve. Socially Ann Haskell believes that in looking at medieval women as Mary or Eve, the Paston women fit neither image and that "there is no evidence of this religious attitude in the Paston Letters." [20] Although this evaluation is somewhat problematic and can be argued, Haskell has difficulty "in imagining that Margaret or her mother-in-law Agnes could be mistaken for Mary, and perhaps even greater difficulty in thinking that the face looking out of the pulpit,

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[19] Davis, 539.

[20] Haskell, 461.

usually that of a man in the family's employ, would confuse a Paston woman with Eve."[21] However, this does not mean that the Paston women had a complete disregard for the church. One of Margaret's fondest hopes for her son Walter was that he would become a priest.

> And also I pray you wryte a lettere in my name to Watere aftere that ye haue knowne myne entent by-fore this to hym ward : so that he doo welle, lerne well, and be of good rowle and disposycion, ther shall nothyng faylle hym that I may helpe with, so that it be nessessare to hym. And bydde hym that he benot to hasty to takyng of orderes that schuld bynd hym till that he be of xxiij yere of agee or more, thoff he be consaled the contrare, for ofty rape rewith. I will loue hym bettere to be a good seculare man that to be a lewit prest.[22]

Yet even in this passage we see that Margaret is more concerned with her sons happiness then in his becoming a priest.

"Because the feminine ideal was only partially drawn, then, real women of the upper social strata affected by it felt no obligation to conform to its pattern only at the points that were definite: in marriage, in the formalities of obedience, and in physical virtue."[23] Agnes and Margaret both conformed to those areas for which behavior was specifically prescribed. They were both married,

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[21] Haskell, 461.

[22] Davis, 370.

[23] Haskell, 462.

obedient and chaste, but relatively free to do what they wished otherwise. Marriage into the Paston family meant frequent separation from the men. In the early years of marriage the men were away at school, then away on business and maintaining their legal professions. This arrangement was one of the single most important factors in determining the women's roles and freedoms. The women's ability to function independently was an absolute necessity. If the women had not been strong and capable of running the estates, the results would have been disastrous to the family. The wife was an essential and equal partner in maintaining the family. When John I writes to Margaret about the workings of the household, there is no shock that a lady would have to struggle and work to maintain the manor. John I encourages, lectures, and criticizes Margaret's actions, never at any time offering to rush home and take charge. John I seems quite confident that Margaret can handle things on her own.

While the women exhibit strength, intelligence, and a certain amount of independence, they did have several handicaps. Haskell outlines these handicaps as follows: women were not formally educated for their jobs, they had the frequent physical inconvenience of pregnancy, they were responsible not only for the management of the land, but of the household and the family, the

were responsible for marriage negotiations, and resolving conflicts between the sons and the mothers for control.[24]

There is nothing at all in the letters concerning Margaret's education. But she would have probably learned estate management from her mother and from Agnes. Her ability to help John I would certainly have been taken into consideration during the marriage negotiations. In regard to births, we know that Margaret had eight living children and she probably would have had more pregnancies than the eight that survived. Although the physical aspect may have hindered her ability to run the household, "her childbearing was the obvious and ultimate statement of femininity." [25] In continuing to bear children it was obvious to the community that she was fulfilling her role as wife and mother. While this may have made her position more acceptable to the community, it increased her responsibilities within the household. With more children, conflicts between sons increased, as did the need for successful marriage negotiations. Agnes and Margaret were both widowed and neither remarried. While this brought additional responsibilities, it removed whatever personal restriction they may have felt in marriage.

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[24] Haskell, 464-465.

[25] Haskell, 464.

The Paston women not only managed the land, they also managed the household and family. The letters are filled with accounts of foods that were needed to feed family, servants, and visitors. The upkeep and maintenance of everything was also the women's responsibilities from the grounds to the garments for the family. There are letters requesting John I to bring home additional goods from London because a dress or night shirt has been worn out. The requests vary from weapons, to fabrics, to sugar loaves.

> I prey zou if ze haue any old gownys for lynyngys and old schetys and old schertis that my non lengere ser ven zou, I prey zou send hem hom in hast, for I must okupye seche thyngys in hast.[26]

Almost every letter from Margaret to John I makes reference to some need that the family has or some decision that Margaret has made concerning the management of the estates.

It is interesting that, while Agnes and Margaret appear to have been strong, self-aware characters, they would both experience difficulty in allowing their daughters to marry by choice. However, neither Agnes nor Margaret had chosen their spouses, and it is apparent that they felt that it was inappropriate for their daughters to do so. Bennett remarks, "The bitterness of medieval women seems

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[26] Davis, 234.

never to have reached greater depths than in dealing with their daughters, with whom some degree of self-identification must have been present." [27] The cases of Elizabeth and Margery illustrate admirably that freedom of choice was available to determined women, even in the face of great family pressure. There was, however, the double standard of marriage choice. Women of position could refuse a prospective spouse or wed whom they desire, but such a choice was likely to involve ostracism from the family, as in the case of Margery. Some daughters, as in the case of Elizabeth, had to endure physical punishment as well. Elizabeth endured her punishment and in the end seems to have made a match that was acceptable to herself as well as to her family. Men on the other hand had some freedom to marry, or not to marry, without any fear of familial retribution, although there was pressure on the oldest son to produce an heir.

When a father died, the eldest son became the head of the family. However, in the case of both Agnes and Margaret, how they related to their eldest sons differed significantly. Margaret and John I were married and living at the Paston estates when John I's father died. While Agnes was the matriarch of the family she shared her

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[27] Bennett, 79.

responsibilities with Margaret, as the wife of the first son. None of the letters make any reference to Margaret and Agnes not getting along. In fact in one case Margaret encourages her husband to remain on good terms with his mother. The relationship between John I and Agnes was at times strained, due to a conflict over control. However, Margaret's situation was probably more difficult. When John I died John II became the 'head' of the family. Unlike John I, John II was totally inept at running the estates, so in reality Margaret and his younger brother John III actually ran the Paston properties. What was hardest on the family was that John II was also unprepared to take over his father's London business. His pursuit of the chivalric life at court had left him unprepared for the realities of daily living. While John II and Margaret often had disagreements they managed to stay on good terms with each other and Margaret continued to run the family's affairs.

Haskell believes that "the letters of the Paston family...stand in distinct contrast to the popular notions of well-born medieval women, deduced from such models as romance heroines."[28] Agnes and Margaret can be seen as practical individuals of real economic and social *power* in their later lives. Despite the fact that the

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[28] Haskell, 460.

betrothal was arranged on a completely practical basis, the relationship between John I and Margaret seems to have been one of love and respect.

> The marriage contract of John and Margaret Paston was the foundation for and endeavor to which both partners contributed equally. In such an atmosphere the woman operated independently and freely on a par with her husband. Such an environment made possible a relationship in which mutual sentiment, economic enterprise, and children could endure and even flourish."[29]

These images break with the concept of the subordinate woman, or at least challenges it.

All of the selected historians agree on one thing. Women were subordinate in the middle ages. But then the question arises how did medieval girls become adult women of such self-assurance as the Paston women? Nowhere in the Paston letters does one get a sense of subordination. There is no faintness of heart present, no victims crying for help. Even Elizabeth and Margery stood their ground, made some tough decisions, and lived with the consequences. These women were not victims of their times or the men around them. They lived within a society that had certain expectations of its women and men. How these women lived within that society was based on their characters and the set of circumstances presented to

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[29] Haskell, 471.

them by life itself. To say that these women had no *power* because they could not hold public office or move in a male defined world is demeaning to their very lives.

Twentieth century historians have often defined subordination and *power* based on a male understanding of society. In the middle ages men wrote about those things which they thought were important and for the most part they excluded women and the roles they played in society. But this does not mean that the roles they played were not valuable, nor does it preclude women having real power within certain spheres. We need to look at the fifteenth century woman not through the eyes of the twentieth century but through her own. The Paston women were not subordinate to their husbands; they were partners. They upheld the virtues of family, honor, loyalty, respect, and yes obedience. That was how they lived and I think they were proud of their lives and their children. For the Pastons there was nothing, including the church, more important than the advancement of their family and the welfare of their children. Haskell openly contradicts her opening paragraph, which was quoted at the beginning of this chapter.

> The marriage contract of John and Margaret Paston was the foundation for an endeavor to which both partners contributed equally. In such an atmosphere the woman operated independently and freely on a par with her husband. Such an environment made possible a relationship in which mutual

sentiment, economic enterprise, and children could endure and even flourish.[30]

The Paston Letters provide us with an opportunity to view these women in their own world. Colin Richmond warns that "there is no substitute for their (The Pastons) own words. To try to modernize even the spelling is to tamper with expression and thus the meaning."[31] However, the letters stand as a window into the lives of this family, allowing us to glean what we are able. The letters are a wealth of information concerning education, law, finance, economics, social relations, politics, and many others. There is much research left to be done, particularly concerning the women. A complete analysis of the women's lives needs to be done. Richmond remarks that "the history of mankind may often be summed up in the changes that have overtaken one community, one family or one man... and that history has to be a passion as well as a discipline."[32] If history is a passion one could easily become enamored with the women in the Paston Letters.

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[30] Haskell, 471.

[31] Richmond, x.

[32] Richmond, xii.

CHAPTER VII

CONCLUSION

The Pastons give us a unique opportunity to view almost an entire century through the eyes of one family. We have seen that the family models of Stone do not always apply to the Pastons. We must then assume that they were either an exceptional family or that Stone may have overgeneralized his theories and overlooked a major source of information in his work. However, Houlbrooke's and Rosenthal's ideas on the family are much more reflective of the lives actually led by the Pastons. Therefore, while we cannot say that the Pastons were average, they were certainly not exceptional.

The lives of the women did not fit the models established by Stone. The women of the Pastons were strong individuals, sharing in the responsibilities of the family and at times equal partners with their husbands. Their power came from the home itself, as they managed the estates, educated their children, protected their property and looked after the future financial interests of the family. Houlbrooke allows for this form of power in his studies on women,

recognizing that within a more private world the women had some power. Rosenthal tends to skirt around the issue of women focusing more on the power that they received as widows not as wives.

The problem of doing a case study, is that the generalizations drawn are too narrow. However, the intent of this work was to compare this particular family's history to existing theories. If these theories were correct or encompassing enough they would have enfolded the Paston family. Houlbrooke's theories did this. Rosenthal's arguments did not include all aspects of the family, particularly children and education, although his structural analysis of the family fit the Pastons well. Stone's arguments set up a nice back drop from which to analyze the family, although with few exceptions the Pastons did not fit his models of the fifteenth century family.

There is still so much that could be done with the Paston letters. Each chapter of this thesis could be expanded. The roles of the women need a more complete analysis and the impact of education in particular could also be evaluated. The Paston letters are unique and should continue to be studied in more detail.

APPENDIX

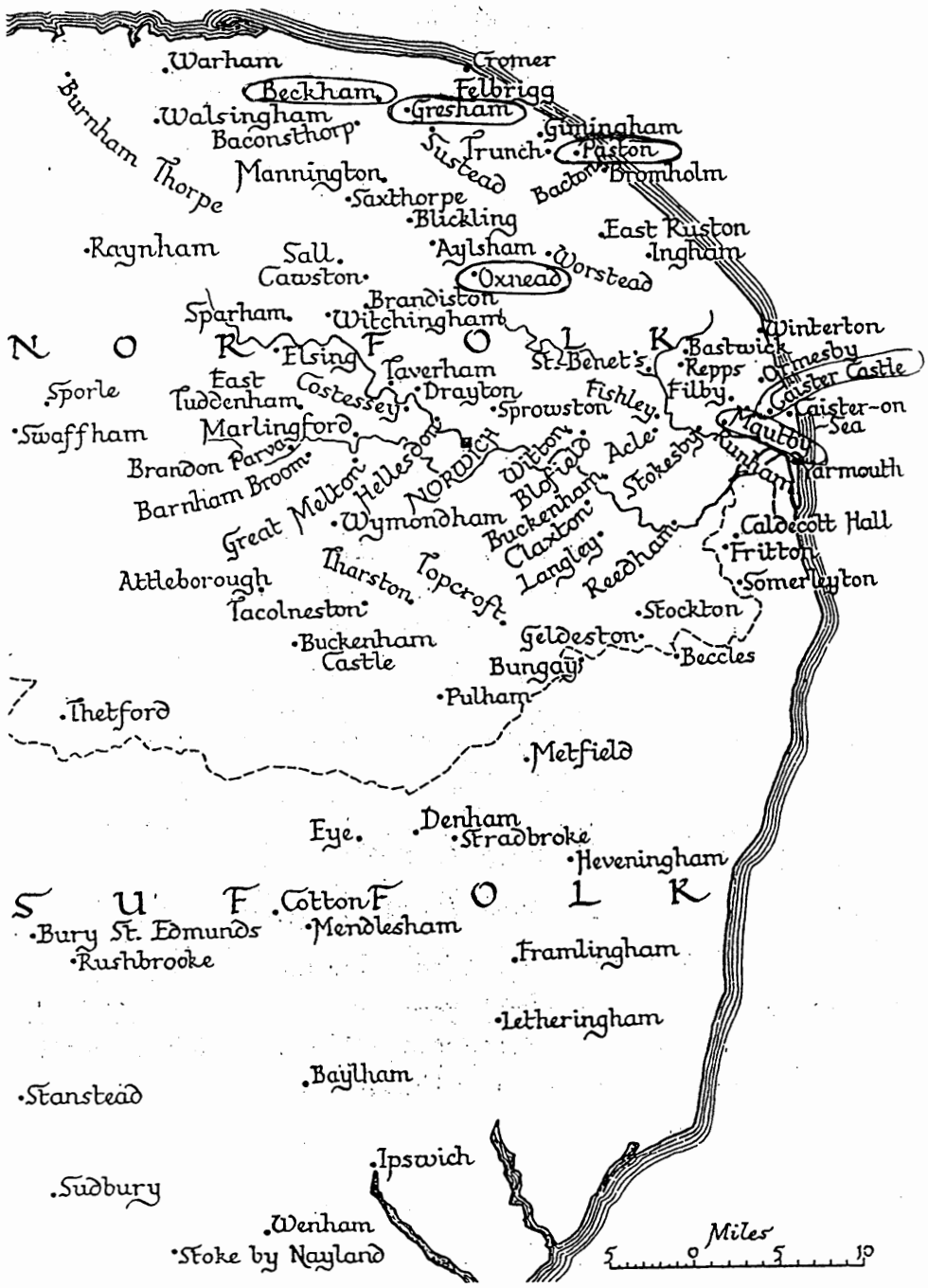
SUBJECT CASE HISTORIES

The Pastons

William (1378-1444) = Agnes 1420 (d. 1479)

John 1421-66 = Margaret 1440 Mautby (d. 1484)	Edmund 1425-49	William 1436-96 = Lady Anne Beaufort (k. 1455)	Clement 1442-1479	Elizabeth c. 1429-88 = (1) Edward Poynings (k. 1461) (2) George Browne (k. 1483)

Sir John II (1442-79)	John III (1444-1504) = (1) Margery 1477 Brew	Edmund (d. by 1504)	Walter (c. 1456-79)	William (1459-1503)	Margery (? - 1479) = Richard Calle 1469	Anne (1494-95) = William Yelverton 1477



Davis, Norman. The Paston Letters: A Selection in Modern Spelling. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1983), xxvii.

William Paston

William Paston was born in 1378, the son of Clement and Beatrix Paston of Norfolk. In 1420 he married Agnes Berry. In 1444 he died and was buried in the Lady Chapel of Norwich Cathedral.

Agnes Paston

Agnes (Berry) Paston was the daughter and heiress of Sir Edmund Berry of Orwellbury near Royston, Hertfordshire. Agnes married William Paston I in 1420. Agnes died in London about August 18 1479.

The Children of William I and Agnes Paston

John Paston I

John was born in 1421. In 1440 John married Margaret Mautby, the marriage had been arranged by the parents. John died in London, May 21st or 22nd, 1466 and was buried in Bromholm Priory, Norfolk.

Edmond Paston I

Edmond was born in 1425 and died in 1449, little is known about him.

Elizabeth Paston

Elizabeth Paston, later Poynings, and Browne was born probably in 1429. Elizabeth eventually did marry, evidently late in 1458 to Lord Robert Poynings. Elizabeth and Robert had one son, who later became Lord Edward. Poynings was killed at the second battle of St. Albans in February 1461.[13] In 1471 Elizabeth married Sir George Browne of Betchworth, Surrey, by whom she had a son and a daughter. Browne was executed on 3 December 1483 for rebellion against Richard III. Elizabeth made her will in May 1487, and died in 1 February 1488.

William Paston II

William was born in 1436. Prior to 1470 he married Lady Anne Beaufort, daughter of the Duke of Somerset. We know that he had at least four daughters, one of whom died in childhood. He died in September 1496.

Clement Paston II

Clement was born in 1442. Like his brothers he went to Cambridge and was under the care of a tutor. There are only a few letters from Clement and it is believed that he was probably dead by

the time of his mother's will in 1479.

Margaret Paston

Margaret was born in her grandfather's home of Reedham. She married John Paston I in approximately 1440. They had eight children. She was ill in 1478 and wrote her first will. When she recovered her will was voided and an effective will was made in February 1482. She died on November 4, 1484. Margaret was buried in Mautby Church.

The Children of John I and Margaret Paston

John Paston II

John II was born in 1442. In 1469 he became engaged to marry Anne Houte, but after many negotiations the engagement was broken in 1477. He died in 1479 and was buried in Whitefriars Priory. He left a natural daughter by Constance Reynforth, who was recognized in Margaret's will. But perhaps most interesting to historians is the inventory of his books which he had drawn up in 1475.

John Paston III

John III was born in 1444 and first appears as his mother's

secretary. In 1477 he was contemplating marriage with Margery Brews, whom he was able to marry with the help of his mother. He had two sons by Margery. After Margery's death in 1495 he married Agnes, daughter of Nicholas Morley of Glynde, Sussex. She had been married twice before. John III died in 1504.

Edmund II, Walter and William Paston

John II and Margaret had three other sons. Edmund's birth is unknown but he died prior to 1504. Walter's birthdate is also not clear but it had to be later then 1455 since he was not 24 years old when he died in 1479. The cause of his death is unknown, he fell ill and perished. William was probably born in 1459. Sometime after 1503 he became "troubled with sickness and crazed in his mind."

Margery Paston

Margery Paston, later Calle, was the daughter of Margaret and John I. There is some question as to her actual birthdate. But in 1469 she shocked her mother and brothers by clandestinely binding herself to Richard Calle, their head bailiff. Margery had three sons. Margaret's omission of Margery in her will could mean that Margery had died before it was made or that Margaret chose not to include her. However, since Walter Paston's will also omits her and Edmond

shortly afterwards uses "my sister" without distinguishing a name, it is possible that she was already dead by 1479.

Anne Paston

Anne Paston, later Yelverton, was first mentioned by name by John III in 1465 when she was living at Hellesdon. In March of 1477 Anne appears to have been still living with her mother. Before June of the same year, however, she had married William Yelverton. Anne appears to have had only one child, which did not live. Margaret's will left her various legacies, but mentioned no children. Anne died in 1494 or 1495

In 1469 she needed neckerchiefs to meet the standards of the household in which she had been pleased. "I pray yow fore-gete not to send me a kersche of cremell fore nekkerchys fore yowr syster Anne, fore I am schente of the good lady that sche is cyth be-cawse sche hathe non, and I can non gette in alle thys towne."[1] The home she was in was that of Sir William and Lady Calthorp, of Burnham Thorpe. Calthorp, probably in 1470, asked Margaret Paston to make other arrangements for Anne, indicating that she had been with them for some time. By June of 1472 Margaret was discussing

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[1] Davis, 339.

negotiations with John II concerning Anne's marriage to William Yelverton. "As for your sister Anne, Master Godfrey and hys wyffe and W. Grey of Martyn arn vp-on a-powntment wyth me and yowr brothere John so that ye agre ther-to and be here good brother." [2] These negotiations did not go altogether smoothly, and John II in 1473 was concerned lest her "old love" for John Pampyng be rekindled. John Pampyng was a family servant. The situation was no doubt uncomfortably reminiscent of the relationship between Richard Calle and Margery. "As towchyng my sustre Anne, I vnderstand she hathe benn passyng seek but I wende that she had ben weddyd...But among all other thyngys I praye yow be ware that the olde love off Pampyng renewe natt. He is nowe fro me; I wott nat what he woll doo."[3] In 1476 John II suggested a different match. Nothing came of this, and in March of 1477 Anne appears to have been still living with her mother. Before June of the same year, however, she had married Yelverton.[4]

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[2] Davis, 365.

[3] Davis, 472.

[4] Davis, 378.

The Other Women Represented in The Letters

The other women represented in the letters include the wives of the sons. Lady Anne Beauford, third daughter of Edmund, Duke of Somerset married William Paston II sometime before 1470. Catherine Spelman, daughter of John Spelman, Esq., widow of William Clippesby, Esq., married Edmond Paston II in 1480 or 1481. Margaret Monceaux, daughter of Thomas Monceaus, Gent., widow of William Lomnor, Gent., and Thomas Briggs, Gent., married Edmond Paston II in 1491 after the death of his first wife Catherine. Margery (Brews) Paston, daughter of Sir Thomas Brews of Topcroft, Norfolk is the most represented of the wives. Her earliest surviving letters are from February 1477, the year in which she probably married John Paston III. In Margery's letters we can see something of romantic love between herself and John III.

> And yf ye command me to kepe me true where-euer I go
> I wyse I will do all my myght yowe to love and neuer no mo.
> And yf my freendys say that I do amys, thei schal not me let
> so for to do,
> Myn herte me byddys euer more to love yowe
> Truly ouer all erthely thing.
> And yf their be neuer so wroth, I tryst it schall be
> bettur in tyme commyng.[52]

Margery was living in Norwich in about 1481, but at Caister in

1486, as is evident by the closing of her letters. Margery also makes continual references to God or blessings on individuals that she cared about. However, she at no time enters into any discussion of a religious nature. In 1489 she went to London, possibly on a pilgrimage of an unclear nature, "also syr I have fulfyllyd myn pylgremage, thanke-it be God." Margery (Brews) Paston died in 1495, and was buried in the White Friar's church in Norwich.

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